

United Kingdom

EC 101: Agenda 6c Syria

Thank you Mr Chair,

The United Kingdom was grateful for the regular briefing last week on Syria's chemical weapons programme. The briefing highlighted in particular the woeful lack of commitment on the Syrian side to complete their initial Declaration. It is now two years since Syria provided any new substantive information. When Syria engages on the substance it is possible to close outstanding issues.

But, the reality we are dealing with is a state desperate to persuade us of its sincere efforts whilst actively thwarting the will of the Executive Council and the OPCW Conference of States Parties.

Syria's complaints about process and legality are a smokescreen. It is no coincidence that Syrian obstruction accelerated in April 2021, after the Conference of States Parties acted to condemn their violations of the Convention.

The Syrian regime's failure to acknowledge its chemical weapons use despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary is indicative of a State Party in denial and very far from compliance with the Convention.

Syria's response to being held responsible for its chemical weapons use was to block the Declaration Assessment Team from doing its job. Exchanges of correspondence are no substitute for the DAT getting on the ground in Syria as they continue to piece together the full picture of Syria's sprawling chemical weapons programme.

As we heard in the briefing last week the DAT has not yet visited all the sites it needs to. Progress to close issues is fastest when the DAT is on-site. There is a route to close more outstanding issues, namely Syria needs to provide the documents requested. Stalling and prevaricating merely reinforce concerns about exactly what Syria is trying to hide.

If Syria was really interested in transparency and cooperation they would allow the Technical Secretariat unfettered access to sites linked to their chemical weapons programme.

Finally Mr Chair, let me underscore the UK's appreciation for the on-going efforts of the Technical Secretariat to fulfil the mandate set for them by this Council and the Conference. The vast majority of States Parties understand the imperative of challenging all chemical weapons use and requiring all states to be held to the same standards.

