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RUSSIAN FEDERATION

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR A.V. SHULGIN
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION TO
THE OPCW AT THE 101ST SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL
UNDER AGENDA ITEM 6(G)**

Mr Chairperson,

The Russian Federation has repeatedly expressed its concern regarding the activities of the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) investigating the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic. In its work, the FFM must strictly adhere to the provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention and meet all the requirements of its Annex on Implementation and Verification, rather than hide behind certain “conventional investigation commission standards and methodologies”. The aforementioned are clearly set out: the collection of evidence is to be carried out directly by Mission members at the site of the incident, the analysis of samples is to take place no more than 20 days following their collection, and 30 days are allotted for the publication of final reports.

We note the selective approach on the part of the FFM regarding incoming information. The information provided by pseudo-humanitarian non-governmental organisations—including from countries that are hostile to the leadership of Syria—is accepted as not requiring verification or proof. Yet the testimonies of professionals and officials regarding the crimes of fighters in Syria are for some reason deemed insufficient for drawing any conclusions. The absence of any information about the FFM’s requests during visits to and contact with territories that are not under the control of Damascus also gives rise to questions. We would like to understand what the reason is for this selectiveness. The terms of reference of the FFM obligate all parties, including counties that have the influence to do so, to provide the mission with all possible assistance.

Separately, we would emphasise that we have never doubted the professionalism of the FFM team members. These are experienced, qualified specialists working in challenging conditions and who are frequently subjected to the strongest kind of psychological pressure. Unfortunately, we do not know of any measures taken by the Technical Secretariat regarding the episodes of exertion of direct pressure on FFM specialists, as took place in the investigation in Douma, for example. We would hate to think that protection of the independence of FFM experts is “switched on” only when they are toeing the line in the interests of a different group of States.

As a result, the activities of the FFM require reform in order to bring it into full compliance with the Convention. If there are difficulties in doing so, then let us consider exactly what States Parties can do in order to help the FFM’s work return to the scope under the Convention.



If needed, let us establish an informal working group to revise the FFM's working methods and terms of reference.

As far as the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) is concerned, Russia confirms its position: it does not recognise the legitimacy of the decision to assign attribution functions within the OPCW, which was pushed through by a vote in June 2018 at a special session of the Conference of the States Parties. This decision was taken by circumventing Article XV of the Convention. Assertions that the IIT's work is allegedly in line with resolution 2118 (2013) of the United Nations Security Council and its call to hold accountable those responsible for the use of chemical weapons are false. The United Nations Security Council never delegated its authorities under Article VII of the United States Charter to the OPCW, let alone the Secretariat. As a result, the activities of the IIT do not only go beyond the legal scope of the Convention, they also violate the Charter of the United Nations.

The operation of the IIT is supported primarily by voluntary donations from States in a consolidation of Euro-Atlantic solidarity. However, the group is financed from contributions to the regular budget, including from States that either do not recognise or do not agree with its activities. We find this situation unacceptable.

With regard to the quality of the IIT's work, we observe that its approaches to investigating chemical incidents comprise the same fundamental flaws as the activities of the FFM, while the methodology used in preparing reports gives rise to serious questions. An approach is being cultivated by which the gathered evidence and facts precipitate from a previously selected version of what took place, without being examined or analysed. The reports themselves are not discussed at the expert level, critical comments are not considered, and indications of their existing gaps, discrepancies, and inconsistencies remain without any response.

Nevertheless, even such dubious reports are used as a pretext for exerting pressure on undesirable countries.

We request that this statement be circulated as an official document of the 101st Session of the Council and published on the Catalyst platform and the OPCW website.

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