



UK Delegation to the OPCW

***Statement to the 102nd Session of the Executive
Council of the Organisation for the Prohibition of
Chemical Weapons***

***by Her Excellency Joanna Roper, Permanent
Representative of the United Kingdom of Great
Britain and Northern Ireland***

Mr Chair, Director-General, Colleagues,

The United Kingdom welcomes the publication of the OPCW's latest report into chemical weapons use in Syria. The chlorine attack in Douma in April 2018 was a horrific attack, in which 43 men, women and children were killed and dozens more injured. The evidence assembled, considered and presented by the investigation team provides undeniable evidence of Syrian state responsibility. We pay tribute to the work of the OPCW's investigation team.

International investigations have now definitively established Syrian regime responsibility for nine separate chemical weapons attacks. The decision to use chemical weapons against Syrian civilians in Douma came more than four years after Syria acceded to the Chemical Weapons Convention. The Syrian regime's deliberate decision to use chemical weapons represents an egregious violation of international law. Syria's non-compliance with the Convention has been laid bare, yet again. Whilst Syria continues to deny the facts and attack the OPCW for doing its job, States Parties must continue to stand firm. We must demand the same standards from Syria as from every other member of this Organisation.

The Syrian regime has been enabled in its chemical weapons use by Russia, another State Party openly flouting its international obligations. On 4 March 2018, Russian state agents used a novichok nerve agent on the streets of Salisbury. One person died and others were injured as a result of that heinous attack. Two years later, another Novichok nerve agent was used in Russia to target Alexey Navalny. Russia's desperate attempts to blame others have served only to compound their culpability.

The Russian state's industrial levels of disinformation to try and distract from their violations of international law continue to this day. We remain very concerned that Russia's baseless allegations of chemical weapons attacks in Ukraine could be used as a pretext for an escalation of their illegal and abhorrent violation of Ukraine's sovereign territory. The Chemical Weapons Convention bans the use of riot control agents as a method of warfare and there would be serious consequences for any use of chemical weapons in Ukraine.

Mr Chair,

Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine has wrought economic shocks and undermined food security in many of the most vulnerable regions of the world. The inflationary pressures facing us all are one facet of that. As the OPCW Secretariat prepares the next biennial budget proposal, difficult decisions will be needed on reprioritising and restructuring. The Organisation must continue to seek efficiencies and grasp new opportunities, such as the exciting launch of the Centre for Chemistry and Technology in May.

The preparatory process for the Review Conference in May is now well underway. The thematic discussions and many high-quality national papers have enriched the discussions and identified many areas of common agreement. As we resume deliberations after the Executive Council, we remain focused on forging agreement with all of those states determined to uphold the provisions of the Convention and ensure that chemical weapons use never goes unchallenged.

Thank you Mr Chair.