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SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR MILAD ATIEH
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC TO THE
OPCW AT THE 102ND SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL
UNDER AGENDA ITEM 6(F)**

Mr Chairperson,

We have read the report by the Director-General (EC-102/DG.15, dated 27 February 2023) regarding the progress in the implementation of decision C-SS-4/DEC.3. In this respect, we highlight the following:

1. Syria has a genuine interest in addressing the threat from chemical weapons use. This is because Syria rejects categorically the use of those weapons by anyone, anywhere, and under any circumstances, and especially because the Syrian people were a victim of the use of toxic substances as weapons in more than one incident by armed terrorist groups and their sponsors in Syria. This is in addition to attempts by some Western States to fabricate those incidents in order to blame them on the Syrian government, exert all forms of pressure on Syria through these alleged incidents, and launch a direct military aggression against Syria on many an occasion.
2. The Director-General repeated in that report a great deal of non-objective information using the same language contained in the monthly reports by the Director-General, which Syria had already addressed in its statement under agenda item 6C, concerning accusations to Syria of hampering the work of the Technical Secretariat as a result of its failure to fulfil its obligations, and of obstructing the holding of the twenty-fifth round of consultations between the Declaration Assessment Team and experts of the Syrian National Authority.
3. Syria affirms that it has adhered to the provisions of paragraph 7 of Article VII of the Convention and that it has been cooperating with the OPCW over the past nine years, facilitating and supporting the work of the Secretariat with sincerity and in good faith. The truth about Syria's cooperation is in total contradiction with the report by the Director-General. Syria hopes that the Director-General refers to this matter in his report.
4. The Syrian Arab Republic reaffirms its explicit and clear position rejecting the decision of the Fourth Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties in June 2018. This decision is politicised, contradicts the provisions of the Convention, was imposed through voting, and was supported by 82 States only out of 193 States Parties. This decision contributes to the OPCW's departure from the objectives for which it was established and will have a negative impact on the future of the Organisation in the long run.



5. As for the illegitimate Investigation and Identification Team (IIT), Syria reaffirms its refusal to recognise the team and to deal with it because it was established with no legal foundation and because it has an illegal mandate that is not underpinned by the Convention. The reports issued so far by the IIT prove beyond any doubt the sheer scale of politicisation and the objectives for which the team was established, namely accusing Syrian figures and sovereign names and symbols, based on the will, instructions, and directives of some States that are known for their anti-Syrian positions.
6. The report of the illegitimate IIT on the alleged Douma incident (2018) is clear evidence of the validity of Syria's and many other States' position regarding the illegitimacy of this team and its objectives, as well as its lack of integrity and professionalism.

The report consists of a fabricated story that began when the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) falsified facts in its report on the alleged Douma incident in 2018. Then came the illegitimate IIT to develop a false hypothesis accusing the Syrian government of the alleged incident. The IIT looked for events, accounts, or information to corroborate the accusation, describing them at times as credible and saying at other times that they were the result of analysis. This means that the IIT twisted the fabricated narrative and all its characters to reach a false accusation that it made the principal hypothesis.

As you may have noticed in that report, the IIT reproduced the FFM's report issued in 2019 in what is called reformulation, trying to take advantage of the gaps, legal irregularities and observations raised by States Parties, experts, researchers, engineers, physicists, chemists and even former OPCW inspectors. Despite all this, the IIT did not succeed in its work and investigations. The only thing it did was develop a hypothesis which is not based in reality and try to prove it in overtly devious ways.

Although we are aware that certain parties have endorsed the report even before reading it, for political reasons and because it is part of the game, the Syrian side will submit in due course a technical, scientific, and engineering study regarding this report. We will first make a few preliminary observations, in the hope that all States Parties will read them to find out the extent of falsification in that report.

I thank you and I request that this statement be considered an official document of the 102nd Session of the Executive Council and posted on the OPCW's public website and on Catalyst.

Annex: Preliminary observations regarding the report of the Investigation and Identification Team on the alleged incident in Douma in 2018.

Annex

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS REGARDING THE REPORT BY THE INVESTIGATION AND IDENTIFICATION TEAM ON THE ALLEGED INCIDENT IN DOUMA IN 2018

In this report there is a fabricated story that began when the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) falsified facts in its report on the alleged Douma incident in 2018. Then came the illegitimate Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) to develop a false hypothesis accusing the Syrian government of the alleged incident. The IIT looked for events, accounts, or information to corroborate the accusation, describing them at times as credible and saying at other times that they were the result of analysis. This means that the IIT twisted the fabricated narrative and all its characters to reach a false accusation that it made the principal hypothesis.

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Although we are aware that certain parties endorsed the report even before reading it, for political reasons and because it is part of the game, the Syrian side will submit in due course a technical, scientific, and engineering study on this report. We will first make a few preliminary observations. We assert that they are merely preliminary observations on the report.

Concerning the form and the procedure:

The IIT did not comply at all with the provisions of the Convention in its investigations.

Concerning the content:

We note the following:

- The report deliberately disregarded the source of the biomedical samples and failed to mention whether the FFM team saw or examined the bodies to determine the cause of death.
- The IIT report deliberately overlooked the analysis results for the biomedical samples mentioned in the FFM report (S/1731/2019, dated 1 March 2019) because they indicated that it was not possible to precisely link the cause of death of the victims to a specific toxic chemical leading to their rapid death (paragraph 9.6 of the FFM Report on the Douma incident). This means that their death is not linked to chlorine gas. The IIT report relied instead on an academic assessment by toxicology institutes and on witness accounts without material evidence of the cause of death. Paragraph 8.15, for instance, indicated that the cause of death, based on theoretical data, was exposure of the victims to high concentrations of chlorine gas.
- The report states that chlorine concentration at Location 2 was at least 1,000 ppm, which is a lethal concentration, but it failed to indicate how this concentration level corresponds to the requirements for gas dispersion calculation. It failed to mention that

the location was open, not closed, and was satisfied with meeting this requirement in theory only.

- The IIT did not adhere to sampling techniques in accordance with the Convention and international standards. Samples were taken without any mention of their source, identity, how they were transported and their chain of custody. This proves the illegitimacy and invalidity of sample collection.
- The report deliberately omitted to mention the presence of traces of substances used for the manufacture of TNT explosives in the concrete sample referred to in the report (Sample 19SLS in Annex 5 to the FFM report), which was collected by the FFM team from the edges of the crater caused by the cylinder at Location 2. This is in contradiction with paragraph 8.26, as the presence of this substance is conclusive evidence that the crater was old and caused by conventional munition.
- Regarding the trajectory of the two cylinders and the attempt to fabricate how they were dropped and how they reached the location of the alleged incident, the report indicates in several paragraphs the trajectory of the cylinders in both sites and the resulting destruction of one cylinder and deformation of the apertures at the impact site, without mentioning the actual observations. For example, the glassware next to the bed onto which the cylinder ‘bounced’, as claimed in the report, was not fractured. Also, the valve at the front of the cylinder was not ruptured, and the front ring of the aerodynamic stabilisation system was not deformed. Furthermore, the cylinder still contained 30% of chlorine gas, according to the OPCW experts who carried out the technical assessment of the two cylinders later. As for the two apertures at Location 2, they are due to the explosion of former conventional weapon systems at a different date. Traces of shrapnel are visible on the walls. The report overlooked the scientific and technical analysis of the diameter and shape of the apertures from inside, as well as the results of the fragmentation studies using numerical analysis to solve a number of issues in all fields of engineering and science, through stress analyses, the study of vibrations, dispersion analysis, etc. This leads to the conclusion that the IIT prepared its report while ignoring the objective facts gathered and the results of the scientific analysis of the data confirming that the two cylinders were not dropped from the air. Assuming for the sake of argument, as stated in the IIT report, that the cylinders were dropped from the air, the shape, dimensions, and deformation of the apertures and the shape of the two cylinders would have had a greater impact than the shape that was observed on the roof, which invalidates the hypothesis that the cylinders were dropped from the air.
- In paragraph 7.1, under General Remarks, the report indicates that the IIT complied with the relevant provisions of the Convention, as well as international best practices of international fact-finding bodies and commissions of inquiry. It refers to document S/1654/2018, which was issued in 2018. Could you clarify what is meant by international best practices? The second question is: Does the IIT comply with these practices, and do they have a place in its work and investigations?
- In paragraph 7.2, the report states that the IIT expanded its sources of information, performed supplementary analyses, and consulted experts. The team might say that revealing the sources of information falls within confidentiality. This is a broad term that covers up legal and procedural irregularities under the pretext of confidentiality. What is this information? What is its source?

- In paragraph 7.4, the IIT enters again into the mazes of interpretations and expressions that can be interpreted in more than one way, stating that some scenarios appeared increasingly less likely. What are these scenarios?
- In paragraphs 8.1 and 8.6, the IIT repeats the terminology that leads to a lack of credibility: There are reasonable grounds to believe! Are there in any national and international methods of investigation, justice, and integrity any such terms and expressions that form the basis for flagrant injustice? We are in an international organisation, not in an inquisition.
- In paragraphs 8.2 and 8.3, we have a nice hypothetical Hollywood scenario. This is a mockery of reason and logic: an unexploded cylinder of a supposedly heavy weight that is dropped from a high altitude, penetrates a steel-reinforced concrete roof, and lies on a bed in a room without causing any damage to the room or the bed. More still, the alleged aperture caused by the cylinder is not consistent with the scale and nature of the cylinder's fall.
- In paragraph 8.7, the report states that there are 68 samples collected by the FFM and two additional samples. How were these two samples collected and what is their source? Has a chain of custody been maintained as stipulated by the Convention? The IIT developed hypotheses which are basically questions and objective observations by some States Parties, experts, and former inspectors, some of whom were involved in the investigations into the Douma incident. The IIT responded to them in a non-objective way that lacks credibility.
- In paragraphs 8.8 and 8.9, the report tries to emphasise the issue of the high chlorine concentration. The question is addressed to experts and chemists: Is it possible to confirm the chlorine concentration level after long periods of time? Or did someone spread this substance, especially in the conifer wood of the bed at Location 4? Obviously, the IIT responds in paragraphs 8.13 and 8.14 that the staging hypothesis is implausible here and that the cylinders were the sole source of chlorine!
- Paragraph 8.11 states that the information and analytical findings supporting the FFM's report (based on samples collected between 14 and 18 days after the incident in accordance with the relevant procedures of the Secretariat), in combination with additional evidence obtained, were sufficient to reach solid conclusions, to the requisite degree of certainty.
- Paragraph 8.13 indicated that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to mimic the spread of chlorine gas. All that was mentioned is an academic finding that does not match reality (The alleged post-impact trajectory of the gas, as if all doors and windows of the building were closed, except for the open doors on the stairs) where gas spread from one floor to the other, only through the stairwell without being dispersed, and in high concentrations causing people to lose consciousness before they could escape, and leading to their death.
- Paragraph 8.16 states that the IIT assessment is that the victims were exposed to high concentrations of chlorine while seeking to escape from the basement to upper floors at Location 2, as per the common protocol "to head to higher ground". This finding is purely academic and illogical in the case of Location 2. It goes against human instinct,

simply because victims would inevitably head outside the building rather than the upper floors, as chlorine gas is supposed to spread from the top downwards within their sight.

- In paragraph 8.19, the IIT tries to find proof of its hypothesis and discovers that no signs of violent trauma are visible in any of the fatalities observed in verified videos and images or based on witness accounts, and that there is no proof that the bodies were moved to the site of the alleged incident.
- In paragraph 8.28, the IIT rules out the hypothesis of the manual placement of the two cylinders at the site of the alleged incident. The question is: Does the damage to the cylinders support the hypothesis that they were dropped by an aircraft from a high altitude (approximately 1,000 metres)? Is this a valid hypothesis?
- In paragraphs 8.29 and 8.30, an utterly absurd hypothesis is put forward. Terrorists in Douma had anti-aircraft heavy weapons. As is known, Syrian Arab Army aircrafts fly at high altitudes exceeding 2,000 metres. However, in the IIT's fake report, the aircraft was flying below 1,000 metres! Even regarding the opening through which the cylinder entered to 'lie' on the bed at Location 4, we had to bend physics and engineering to be able to prove a fictional hypothesis such as in paragraph 8.31! In paragraph 8.34, the report states that Jaysh al-Islam had managed to seize an OSA surface-to-air missile system from the Syrian Army. Yet, the IIT understands that the system was no longer in use at the time of the incident in Douma. We ignore how the IIT came to know that Jaysh al-Islam terrorists could not use these missiles! To add more information, we say to the IIT that heavy weapons are not limited to missiles alone. Terrorists have other dangerous weapons that prevent aircrafts from flying at low altitudes.
- Another strange story is the attempts to choose the airport and the type of aircraft that carried the two cylinders. I and many others imagined that the IIT, or whoever conveyed this misleading information to them, were literally in the operation room of a battle. As in other paragraphs of the report, the IIT tries in paragraphs 8.38 to 8.43 to prove its hypothesis that it was an Mi-8/17 helicopter that dropped the cylinders, mentioning information that appears to be correct. It adds, in paragraph 8.44, that the IIT received credible information according to which the Syrian Arab Air Force assigned a squadron of seven Mi-8/17 helicopters to what the report calls "the Tiger Forces", stating that the seven helicopters operated under the command of Brigadier-General Souheil al-Hasan! To prove its hypothesis, the report states that its findings are supported by the temporal coincidence between the arrival of the Tiger Forces at Dumayr airbase on 18 February, and the newly observed presence of two Mi-8/17 helicopters on the airbase's central apron. This evidence is utterly absurd and illogical, unless the IIT was a key player in the movements of what it calls "the Tiger Forces" or in a military operation room of the Syrian Army.
- In paragraph 8.47 of the report, the IIT confirms the veracity of what we said with certainty about its reliance on alleged witnesses, open sources, and States Parties! with regard to the call sign for the helicopter that carried the two cylinders. But this time, it said that it could not conclusively link it to the specific sortie(s) associated with the chemical attack. It admits the existence of a contradiction. This leads us to also confirm contradiction with what the IIT called credible information about military movements on 18 February 2018 at the Dumayr military airbase. In paragraph 8.50, the report says that there was infrastructure at the Dumayr airbase that was suitable for the storage of the relevant equipment.

- In paragraph 8-51, the IIT puts forward a narrative which it attributed to credible information from at least two sources to give it credibility, that, in the early evening of 7 April, a meeting of military officials held at the Dumayr airbase discussed the use of chlorine-filled munitions. It gives an account of the chain of command for orders in a fabricated manner suggesting that this operation did in fact take place. The IIT tries to link this false narrative to another in its second report on Ltamenah and Saraqib, stating that the Tiger Forces were involved in the use of chlorine in both towns.
- In paragraph 8.54, the report implicates indirectly the Russian Forces in the alleged incident but denies their involvement in the incident. We had hoped that the IIT would answer a question about the parties that were also supporting, financing, arming, and communicating with terrorists in Ghouta. In paragraph 8.55, the report rules out the possible involvement of the terrorist White Helmets group or any other party in this incident. As usual, the IIT said that it was unable to identify any reliable information supporting the allegations of staging by armed groups or other entities or the possibility of the delivery of the cylinders in question by means other than helicopter.
- The IIT concludes its report with new false information in a manner that departs from the rules of professional, unbiased, and objective investigations. Paragraph 9.3 states that information obtained does indicate that, at this point in the hostilities, use of chlorine as a weapon was delegated by the General Command to operational level commanders. If we ask the question about the source from which the IIT obtained this information, the answer would be simple: from the intelligence services of known States that are involved in providing this team with misleading information, as they did previously in many States, using such information to level accusations, destroy States, and kill millions of innocent people. Examples abound.
- The authors of this report have deliberately ignored reports and scientific and engineering information documented and confirmed by experts in the Organisation who were among the OPCW teams that investigated the incident in 2018 (Inspectors “A” and “B”), who criticised the FFM report on the alleged Douma incident in a scientific and objective manner, and confirmed that the studies and allegations, and thus the conclusions reached by the FFM team in its report on that incident, were not true.
- There are several other reports, such as the report by Dr Theodore Postol from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), which was issued in early June 2019 under the title “Contradictions in scientific conclusions and data in the Fact-Finding Mission team’s report on the chlorine cylinder attack in Douma on 7 April 2018”. The report criticised the alleged fall of the chlorine cylinder, its location, and the hole resulting from the fall, as well as the death of more than 30 people in the alleged incident as a result of the release of high concentrations of chlorine in the upper floor.
- Expert Postol stated that the FFM’s report is marred by the same flaws seen in the seventh report of the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (S/2017/904, dated 26 October 2017) on the Um-Housh and Khan Shaykhun incidents in terms of obvious contradictions and incoherent claims. This corresponds with what the Canadian journalist Aaron Maté, known for his professionalism, said on more than one occasion, that the OPCW concealed the data of the initial report by OPCW officials, rewrote the report on the Douma incident, and excluded the investigators from the

subsequent procedures. As for Inspectors “A” and “B”, they were among the most experienced FFM experts in the Douma incident investigation mission.

- In addition, the Courage Foundation’s report indicated that key information, including chemical analyses, toxicology consultations, ballistics studies, and witness testimonies, was prepared ostensibly to serve a preordained conclusion. The Foundation’s report stated that some inspectors were excluded for the simplest reason that they raised a legitimate concern, highlighted irregular practices in the OPCW, and shared their legitimate observations, assessments, and concerns.

There are scores of objective questions highlighting the amount of falsification in the report of this team. The following are some examples:

1. The Syrian and Russian missions to the OPCW had brought from the city of Douma to the OPCW witnesses whose photographs appeared in the fabricated video that the team relied on in its investigations. Did this team listen to those witnesses or take their testimonies into consideration? Or do the international investigation standards, which were mentioned in the claims included in the report of this team, prevent it from doing so?
2. After the release of this report, several media outlets have recently broadcast interviews with citizens and doctors from Douma, who were affiliated to the so-called "Jaysh al-Islam" terrorist group. They all confirmed that no toxic materials were used as weapons on April 7 and that the terrorists in Douma fabricated this incident with the help of the White Helmets terrorist organisation to justify their departure from Douma and to accuse the Syrian government of this incident. Can this team, the Technical Secretariat, and the Director General take these testimonies into consideration? Do these testimonies change the conclusions of this fabricated report?
3. It was stated in the report that the city of Douma was completely besieged between February and April 2018, and that an agreement was being reached, as the final agreement for the terrorists’ departure from Douma, at a time when the city had fallen militarily, and the Syrian Arab Army was a few hours away from entering the city. The question to be asked is: what is the wisdom behind using chlorine at that particular timing and what benefits would the Syrian government reap from such use since the terrorists would leave the city in hours?

My country’s delegation regrets that the Technical Secretariat and some known States are blindly adopting everything issued by this team, not on the basis of its professionalism, integrity, and objectivity, but because it drafts its reports to the liking of those States, in order to accuse the Syrian government of chemical weapons use in alleged incidents.

Proceeding from our commitment to the OPCW and its future, we affirm the need to correct the legal violation committed through the establishment of this team and to revise the FFM’s working methods and approaches that blatantly contradict the Convention and the terms of reference agreed upon with the Syrian government. In this context, we highlight the dirty role played by the White Helmets terrorist group, which is the principal arm of terrorists, in fabricating these scenarios to achieve a single goal, which is to accuse the Syrian government of using chemical weapons.