

STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR THOMAS SCHIEB,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF GERMANY TO THE OPCW,
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The demise of the Assad regime, ending a dictatorship that lasted more than 50 years, is epochal, and it is a great moment of joy and hope for the Syrian people.

As in any revolution, the situation is characterized by hope, but also by uncertainty. Germany wishes Syria nothing more than the situation to stabilise quickly and a new, peaceful, democratic, internationally responsible Syria to emerge.

11 years ago Syria acceded to the CWC, after chemical weapons had been used by the Assad regime. In spite of Syria's accession, chemical weapons use continued in the civil war, as broadly documented by the OPCW. 11 years of obfuscation and evasion regarding Syria's incomplete Initial Declaration only allow the conclusion that parts of Assad's chemical weapons program have been secretly continued.

This is now the moment to get rid of all chemical weapons and all related material still in Syria, to rid the country of chemical weapons for good.

At the same time, we are very concerned that remaining chemical weapons, precursors and other toxic chemicals could now fall into the wrong hands.

To prevent this, relevant storehouses and facilities need to be identified, secured, and opened for inspection by the OPCW. The new Syria must assume its obligations under the CWC. We will judge the new Syrian authorities by their action. Now is the opportunity to finally and verifiably destroy the remnants of Assad's chemical weapons program which has brought so much suffering over the Syrian people.

We fully support the Technical Secretariat in its efforts to achieve the full and verified implementation of the CWC with regard to Syria. We very much appreciate DG Arias' not wasting any time and reaching out to Syria immediately. The OPCW needs to engage with the newly established Syrian authorities as soon as possible, with the objective to urgently agree on ways how to secure and verify facilities in question, as a first step.

It is safe to say that for the OPCW, challenging months lie ahead. The OPCW will be able to benefit from a plethora of knowledge and expertise, thanks to the past activities of FFM, DAT and IIT. However, it will probably need a lot of support in order to be able to fulfil its mandate in very difficult, constantly changing circumstances.

Germany stands ready to support the OPCW in this situation, as we have done in earlier cases. Let me just recall Germany's contribution to the destruction of Syrian chemical weapons 2014-15 and to the final destruction of Libya's chemical weapons 2016-17 which was achieved in spite of a fragile security situation in the country thanks to a remarkable exercise of international support and cooperation.

The new situation in Syria also provides new opportunities for promoting and achieving accountability. Efforts should be redoubled to seize, prosecute and convict the perpetrators of CW use against the Syrian people. The UN-OPCW Joint Investigative Mechanism and the IIT managed to collect significant amounts of evidential information, identifying those responsible for the very serious crime of CW use. This information should be put to good use, and it will hopefully be instrumental in finally holding the perpetrators of these horrible crimes accountable.