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STATEMENT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL UNDER AGENDA ITEM 6(C) ELIMINATION OF THE SYRIAN CHEMICAL WEAPONS PROGRAMME

1. As this is a very special agenda item, I wish to say a few words that will assist you in placing into context your debate related to this item of the agenda.
2. On 8 December, a new Government in Syria came to power and, despite the difficult legacy it received, we soon hoped that the new situation would allow the Organisation to make progress on Syria's chemical weapons dossier, after 11 years of obstruction by the former regime. Thanks to the mediation of the Ambassador of Qatar to the Netherlands, a few days later, I established personal contact with the new Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr Al-Shaibani.
3. At the beginning of February, I travelled to Damascus, accompanied by a relevant delegation of Secretariat staff members, including the Deputy Director-General, and a member of the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT). During this visit I was received by the President of Syria and by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and I had substantive conversations with both of them. The meetings were very positive, and they constitute new grounds for constructive cooperation.
4. Since then, the Secretariat teams have deployed three times (in March, April and June) to Syria, met with relevant Syrian counterparts, and visited nine sites. The teams have also taken samples and gathered relevant information.
5. We have already identified a significant number of locations of interest, potentially connected to the previous government's chemical weapons programme. These locations must all be visited and assessed.
6. If chemical weapons are discovered as a result of the visits, the sites must be secured and the chemical weapons-related components must be relocated to a protected storage facility, pending their eventual destruction. In some exceptional circumstances, destruction on site might be necessary.
7. I wish to underline the legal framework that will govern our actions. The new authorities have inherited the commitments deriving from Syria's membership in international treaties, including the Chemical Weapons Convention. They have also inherited a chemical weapons programme, with its share of unanswered questions, left behind by the former political regime.



8. The Secretariat remains fully committed, with a friendly and positive approach, to assist Syria in this special moment. However, we cannot ignore the status of the Syrian Arab Republic in the Organisation, which is a fact before us. The Syrian Arab Republic acceded to the Convention on 14 September 2013. According to paragraph 8 of Article IV of the Convention, any State Party acceding to the Convention after 2007 shall destroy its chemical weapons according to the order of destruction and the procedures for stringent verification determined by the Executive Council. The Executive Council determined the conditions in the decisions it adopted on 27 September 2013 and on 15 November 2013. The principles enshrined in both decisions are still in force.
9. Additionally, in April 2021 the Conference of the States Parties adopted a decision suspending the rights of Syria to: vote in the Conference and the Council; stand for election to the Council; and to hold any office of the Conference, Council and subsidiary body. The same decision provides that these rights and privileges will be reinstated by the Conference only when the Director-General has reported that Syria has completed all the required measures laid out in the decision.
10. Taking into consideration what I have mentioned, and the new opportunities that the good cooperation the Syrian authorities are demonstrating, we need to do the following:
 - (a) continue visiting the sites related to chemical weapons, by the Secretariat together with the Syrian authorities;
 - (b) have Syria produce new declarations regarding the chemical weapons that will be discovered;
 - (c) have Syria count, if needed, on the support of the Secretariat for this declaration;
 - (d) proceed with the stringent verification by the Secretariat of all the declarations made by Syria; and
 - (e) decide, in due time, the methods of destruction by the Syrian authorities.
11. The Secretariat will have to confirm—and this is essential—that the methods of destruction that Syria decides to implement meet the following four requirements, namely, that:
 - (a) The irreversible destruction to be carried out by Syria with the selected methods, can be verified by the Technical Secretariat.
 - (b) The safety of the people involved in the destruction or civilians living in the area is guaranteed.
 - (c) The protection of the environment is assured.
 - (d) All relevant evidence related to use of chemical weapons in Syria can be collected and preserved by the Secretariat, and not destroyed, to ensure that no prejudice is made to the effective implementation of other mandates, such as identifying the perpetrators.

12. As I said, the number of sites to be visited will be considerable, probably more than one hundred. Syria does not have the means to secure all sites, and even less those where relevant chemical weapons or related equipment will be found. The transportation to a selected centralised facility, where storage and destruction will take place, will be the favoured approach.
13. However, as some chemical weapons-related sites are likely to be in a hazardous state, with chemical weapons deteriorated, probably leaking, and lacking of any protective measures, the transportation to a secure place for their destruction will be difficult or impossible and dangerous, and should be discarded. Such situations will have to be assessed by the Syrian authorities on a case-by-case basis to determine whether they can be considered for an ad hoc method of on-site expedited destruction.
14. In such situations, the Secretariat would have the responsibility to ensure that destruction under its verification meets the four criteria mentioned above.
15. Only the Executive Council has the authority to approve expedited destruction in these situations.
16. At the same time, it is necessary for you to be realistic and to provide a legal basis for the Secretariat's activities on site in Syria, so that these can be operational and effective. In all likelihood a significant number of hazardous sites may require expedited on-site destruction. As action with these kind of sites may need to be taken as swiftly as possible, it will not be possible to secure them until regular destruction activities will commence.
17. That is why it will be necessary for the Council to entrust the Secretariat and Syria with the capacity to destroy such chemical weapons and/or sites in an expeditious manner, as I have outlined.
18. The other alternative would be to summon a special meeting of the Executive Council each time a chemical weapons-related site will be assessed and recommended for expedited destruction. This would be very impracticable and would consume significant time and attention of the Council, which we should avoid.
19. In all instances, should the Council consider it appropriate to grant certain flexibility authorising expedited destruction of such sites, the Council would be regularly and accurately updated on the progress in the activities carried out pursuant to such a Council decision.
20. I refer to this situation in order to give the Council ample time to consider the best solution so that we will be ready to carry out an effective process of destruction when the time comes.

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