



## **STATEMENT AS PREPARED**

### **UNITED STATES OF AMERICA STATEMENT ON AGENDA ITEM 6 (c) ELMINATION OF THE SYRIAN CHEMICAL WEAPONS PROGRAM TO THE 111TH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr. Chair, Colleagues,

We all share an interest in preventing the proliferation of any remnants of this program; and we support strong cooperation between the Syrian government and the TS to find, declare, and verifiably destroy any remnants of the Assad regime's program.

We also recognize that the Syrian government will need time to understand and bring to light information on the Assad regime's program, to update Syria's declaration, and to destroy any remnants.

We are pleased, therefore, that the Syrian government continues to demonstrate, through its actions on the ground and to the best of its ability, a strong commitment to locating and destroying any chemical weapons remnants on its territory.

These actions on the ground have included giving the OPCW access to sites, witnesses, and documents; discovering remnants of the program itself and immediately informing the Technical Secretariat about these discoveries; and mobilizing significant resources and manpower to organize OPCW site visits.

The recent OPCW report on Kafr Zeita, for instance, which concluded that the Assad-era Air Force used chlorine as a chemical weapon on October 1, 2016, marks, according to the TS, "the first instance of cooperation by [Syria] with an IIT investigation." This is a stark contrast to the years of deliberate obstruction by the Assad regime and its partners.

We also take note of the UN Security Council ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee's decisions to remove senior Syrian government officials, and Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, from the Council's ISIL/Daesh sanctions regime. This and other recent sanctions relief should further enable Member States to provide counter-CW assistance to Syria.

We hope that progress on the ground continues apace. We take note of the Director-General's Note Verbale regarding the disposition of certain chemical weapons-related cylinders.

Needless to say, this situation should never have occurred. Fortunately, we understand that Syria immediately took action to locate the fragments of the cylinders and facilitate the TS's access to them. We welcome the Syrian Note Verbale of February 23 and are encouraged that the Syrian government has recognized the seriousness of this matter and is taking steps to prevent a recurrence of this scenario.

We are also hopeful that the pace of site visits in Syria will continue to accelerate. We welcome the Secretariat's continuous presence on the ground and its efforts to work through many challenges.

The OPCW is a technical body and its work in Syria is – *and has always been* – technical. This work is essential. We thank all States Parties who have funded the OPCW's work in Syria over the years. We continue to call on more countries, especially those in the region, to join us in this regard.