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SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR BASSAM AL-SABBAGH
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC TO THE
OPCW AT THE SEVENTY-EIGHTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairperson,

First of all, I should like to thank Mr Nihad Alihodzic for the presentation he has just made and for the efforts that he and his team are making to help the relevant Syrian authorities clarify some aspects of the initial declaration. In light of his report, his presentation today and the remarks made by some delegations, I wish to make the following observations:

1. The initial declaration and amendments thereto

We note that the manner in which some delegations are addressing the issue of the Syrian initial declaration is underpinned by two things, the first of which is bad faith and constant suspicion, and the second is to consider that the glass is half-empty rather than half-full, that is to say, criticism instead of recognition of the progress made so far thanks to the cooperation of the Syrian authorities with the Declaration Assessment Team.

Amending in any way the initial declaration should in no case mean that there are hidden or deliberate goals, as some States are trying to suggest for the sole aim of tarnishing the image of the Syrian cooperation and diverting attention from the major successes achieved so far.

The fact that the Syrian Arab Republic is striving to complete its declarations so that they reflect accurately the reality, and that it has welcomed and is cooperating closely with the Technical Secretariat Declaration Assessment Team, which has expressed its full satisfaction, ought to be met with the satisfaction and appreciation of all.

2. Ricin

One State Party mentioned in its statement that “the nature of ricin remains unclear”. I ask this State Party in return: what is unclear about it? We have stated time and again that the project was stopped more than 10 years before the accession of the Syrian Arab Republic to the Convention. Bearing in mind that this substance has a short life span in all cases, that the site had been attacked, looted and destroyed by armed terrorist groups, and that Site 25 concerning ricin was mentioned in the initial declaration submitted on 26 October 2013, what then remains unclear to this State Party?



3. The Scientific Studies and Research Centre

First, the Scientific Studies and Research Centre, which is a multidisciplinary research centre, should not be confused with the research and development laboratories dedicated for the chemical weapons programme and located within Section 3600 sites. There is also a central laboratory for research and development, which has been declared (at the Al-Dhamir 3 Site) and has received a visit by an inspection team.

With respect to results of analysis of the sample taken from the SSRC, as Mr Nihad has said, the Syrian side has initiated an internal investigation into the matter, despite the technical and legal debate concerning the sampling procedure and even before the results of the analysis of that sample came out.

4. Documents pertaining to the accidental release of amounts of DF and the destruction of amounts of sulphur mustard

In order to make up for the lack of documents on the accident which led to the release of an amount of DF, and on the destruction of amounts of sulphur mustard, the Syrian side had proposed that interviews be conducted with the individuals involved in order to clarify all the surrounding circumstances. It is astonishing that, while considering that such interviews cannot be a substitute for documents, some States are nonetheless complaining today that the Declaration Assessment Team had not yet been able to complete interviews with some of the individuals concerned. These States need to make their position clear.

5. Aerial bombs

The conversion of the 2,000 aerial bombs to conventional ones took place before the accession of the Syrian Arab Republic to the Convention. The OPCW has been provided with an official document indicating that all those bombs had been consumed before 1 November 2013, and assurances have been given that they had been converted in an irreversible manner.

6. Results of the analysis of samples taken by the Declaration Assessment Team

The Declaration Assessment Team had already been informed that, after completion of the processing of a given substance, all equipment used in production trains would be disassembled, then reassembled in a new production train for another chemical. DF production equipment, for instance, was the same equipment that had been used, after modification and reassembly, in the production of Component A, which is a VX precursor. Therefore, the existence of traces of different chemicals revealed by the analysis of samples taken from equipment that had been used in the production train of a given chemical makes sense and is not to be excluded. For instance, equipment used in the Hafir 1 Site consisted of Teflon containers previously used for DF storage. After modification, these were installed to be used as main reactors for the production of sarin at the said site. Since these reactors had been tested with isopropanol, the existence of traces of diisopropyl methylphosphonate in the drainage train makes sense. The drainage train may have been used previously in the production train for Component B, which explains the existence of traces of diisopropylaminoethanol. This is typical and may recur for other samples. It should be noted that this was brought to the attention of the Declaration Assessment Team had that this equipment had been tested with water and isopropanol, not with water and oil.

These were our initial remarks, and the Declaration Assessment Team will certainly have the opportunity to discuss these issues in detail with the Syrian side during its upcoming visit to Damascus. Before concluding my statement, however, I wish to comment on the request by some delegations that a special meeting of the Executive Council be held in late April or early May to discuss the Syrian initial declaration and the work of the Declaration Assessment Team. This request is actually astonishing. We would like to know the reasons for the haste to convene such a meeting while the process between the Declaration Assessment Team and the Syrian technical team is in full swing. Why not wait until the Declaration Assessment Team has finished its work and submitted its final report to the Council? Why not wait until the next session of the Council in early July?

I request that this statement be considered as an official document of this session.

Thank you.

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