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NETHERLANDS

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR PAUL WILKE ACTING
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE NETHERLANDS TO THE OPCW
AT THE EIGHTY-FIFTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairperson,

The delegation of the Netherlands thanks the Director-General for his opening statement and the Vice-Chairpersons for their reports.

Further to the statement pronounced by the Permanent Representative of Estonia on behalf of the European Union, with which the Netherlands fully associates itself, my delegation wishes to make the following remarks:

Less than a week ago, this Council met, yet again, to discuss the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic. On that occasion we condemned in the strongest possible terms the use of sarin as confirmed by the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) in its latest report. The confirmation by the FFM that two persons were exposed to sulfur mustard in Um Housh on 16 September 2016 is to be condemned as well. The OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) will now work to identify those responsible for these heinous acts, so that they can be brought to justice. We have full confidence in the JIM's professionalism and expertise and look forward to its report later in the autumn.

We equally reiterate our trust in the members of the FFM, whose unrelenting dedication, professionalism and courage deserve our unconditional support. To underline our condemnation of the continued use of chemical weapons in Syria, the Netherlands subscribes to the Declaration by France, Germany and other countries.

Last week the Technical Secretariat also issued a new report on the work of the Declaration Assessment Team (EC-85/DG.25, dated 4 July 2017). This document of barely three pages is supposed to be a progress report, but unfortunately there is no progress to report.

Since this Council decided last year to ask the Director-General to engage with the Syrian authorities at the highest level, in a final attempt to verify the accuracy and completeness of the Syrian Arab Republic's declaration and to address the gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies it had identified. The report makes very clear that Syria continues to drag its feet and is unwilling to meet its obligations under the Convention.



Allow me to quote paragraph 3 of the DAT report:

“since the issuance of the Director-General’s report EC-82/HP/DG.2, dated 30 June 2016, the Secretariat has continued to engage with the Syrian Arab Republic on the outstanding issues identified in relation to Syria’s initial declaration and subsequent submissions, mainly through the exchange of letters. Through such letters, the Syrian Arab Republic has presented some clarifications and additional information on some of the outstanding issues. However, this information was not sufficient to resolve any of these issues.”

The report then describes how, after various requests, the Syrian Arab Republic finally provided some additional information. Again however, the apparent cooperation is just window dressing. The conclusion in paragraph 7 of the report is abundantly clear, and again I quote:

“The analysis of the documents submitted by note verbale No. 49 revealed that while these documents provided some details with regards to a few of the outstanding issues under consideration, in the majority of cases this information failed to clarify, beyond doubt, any of these issues [...].”

We are convinced that the members of the Council, like us, see the true character of the Syrian submissions. They are obvious attempts to hide the truth about its chemical weapons programme.

Mr Chairperson, given the time constraints, I will limit myself to these remarks and not go into detail about the other important issues on the agenda. However, before ending I wish to express my delegation’s support for the work of the Open-ended Working Group on Terrorism and its Sub-group on non-State actors, under the very competent guidance of their respective chairpersons, Ambassador Momar Diop of Senegal and Ambassador María Teresa Infante of Chile, as well as the Open-ended Working Group on Future Priorities, led in equally excellent manner by Ambassadors Bruce Koloane of South Africa and Sabine Nölke of Canada. We look forward to their report and recommendations. Thank you.

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