

**RUSSIAN FEDERATION****COMMENT BY THE INFORMATION AND PRESS DEPARTMENT OF THE MINISTRY
OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION ON THE SYRIAN
"CHEMICAL DOSSIER"**

On May 23, the UNSC held its successive discussion on the state of affairs around the so-called Syrian "chemical dossier". The Western "troika" of permanent members of the UN Security Council sought to give an anti-Assad and anti-Russian pronounced spin to this event. It was reconfirmed that these "exposers" of Damascus were not interested in establishing the truth in a crucial issue of who actually stood behind the alleged use of sarin on April 4, 2017, in the Syrian province of Idlib. Representatives of the United States, Great Britain and France have desperately resisted any attempt to figure out to what extent their verdict delivered "in absentia" about the allegedly undeniable responsibility of the Bashar Al-Assad Government for this chemical attack in Khan Sheikhoun was justified.

An unsightly scene has been developed. It seems that almost two months after the chemical incident nobody has been in a hurry to visit Khan Sheikhoun in order to examine all the circumstances of such a high-impact case. Moreover, the Westerners have ruled out even the very option of visiting the Shayirat airbase where, according to their own allegations, the sarin used in Khan Sheikhoun was stored.

Unfortunately, no activity has been undertaken in this regard by the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) that proceeds with postponing its visit to Khan Sheikhoun blaming unfavorable security conditions. As for the leadership of the OPCW – UN Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM), it is yet to develop a plan of investigatory actions indicating sites to visit, individuals to question and documents to claim.

Russia's position on this ongoing situation is well known and crystal clear: the investigation of this incident should be carried out as scrupulously as possible, in strict compliance with the JIM and FFM mandates approved by the UNSC and OPCW and include all investigatory actions, methods and proceedings envisaged in relevant UNSC resolutions and the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). Both Khan Sheikhoun and Shayirat airbase must be visited, the first as the site of this barbaric deed and the second as facility claimed to be allegedly in a direct relation with it. The established vicious practice within the JIM and FFM of conducting investigations in a remote mode based on the evidence provided by questionable witnesses or sometimes even "false victims" is absolutely unacceptable. The resources of NGOs that compromised themselves long ago and have established links with militants and terrorist

¹ English version – unofficial translation



entities are widely used. This is not just an imitation of work – we are dealing with a deliberate, intentional falsification in pursuance of clearly established political objectives.

We once again call upon our Western partners, flaunting their quasi-evidence, to answer a number of the specific questions. In particular, whether the fundamental CWC procedure of chain of custody was observed during the collection of biomedical and other samples, or not? Isn't it time to stop building far-reaching accusatory conclusions on crudely orchestrated, staged video-materials and other unreliable information, with which the irreconcilable Syrian opposition and its foreign patrons abundantly provide the JIM and FFM?

Returning to the issue of a visit to the Shayirat airbase, we recall that, in the early April 2017, Damascus has already provided official guarantees of secure access to it for the FFM specialists. Moreover, the Syrian Government has demanded that such a visit be organized without delay, thus confirming its willingness to fulfill its commitments arising from p. 12 of the FFM Mandate (Terms of Reference) and provisions of p. 15 of Part XI of the Verification Annex to the CWC. It is explicitly stated there that “the inspection team (of the OPCW) shall have the right of access to any and all areas which could be affected by the alleged use of chemical weapons”. Therefore, all prerequisites for organizing such a visit in terms of ensuring security and fulfilling the obligations under the Convention have already been created. So, this is in stark contrast with the JIM's inactivity and an indifferent stand of the OPCW's leadership, which believes that visit to the airbase is beyond the FFM competence.

We insist that along with the FFM the JIM should get involved in the investigation of the situation at the Shayirat airbase. We recall that operative paragraph 6 of UNSC resolution 2319 directs the Joint Investigative Mechanism to offer its services to the OPCW. UNSC resolution 2235, which in fact established the Mechanism, contains pp. 3 and 4 stipulating the requirement to identify those responsible for acquiring and stockpiling chemical weapons. Besides, p. 7 of this resolution clearly states the need for full access to all locations relevant to the investigation. So, why has this provisions been flagrantly disregarded by our opponents?

Not only we but also a number of other countries deem a visit to the Shayirat airbase necessary “based on the facts and circumstances known at the time” (p. 7 of UNSC resolution 2235).

We urge the JIM leadership and the OPCW Technical Secretariat to undertake immediate measures to rectify the current situation, send their specialists to Khan Sheikhoun and the Shayirat airbase without delay, ensure comprehensive and impartial investigation of all circumstances of this case and take other measures under their mandates to “...identify to the greatest extent feasible individuals, entities, groups, or governments who were perpetrators, organisers, sponsors or otherwise involved in the use of chemicals as weapons, including chlorine or any other toxic chemical, in the Syrian Arab Republic...” (p. 5 of UNSC resolution 2235).

Further avoidance of a comprehensive investigation will bring into question the capacity of the JIM and FFM and the necessity of their further existence accordingly.