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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR KENNETH D. WARD
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE
OPCW AT THE EIGHTY-FIFTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairperson, Mr Director-General, distinguished ambassadors and delegates,

At the recent special Executive Council meeting, on July 5, the United States of America addressed in significant detail the recent findings of the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission (FFM). The FFM concluded that on 16 September 2016, an exposure to mustard agent occurred in Um-Housh, Syria. The FFM further concluded that on 4 April, 2017, the nerve agent sarin or a sarin-like substance was used in a chemical weapons attack in Khan Shaykhun – resulting in the deaths of approximately 100 persons and leaving at least 200 more persons suffering acute exposure. Pursuant to the requirements of United Nations Security Council resolutions 2118 (2013), 2235 (2015), and 2319 (2016), the Director-General has officially submitted both of these FFM reports to the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM), through the United Nations Secretary-General. In fulfilment of its mandate, the JIM will now work to identify those involved in the use of chemical weapons with respect to the Khan Shaykhun and Um-Housh attacks.

The United States of America wishes to express its appreciation for the detailed statement that the Director-General delivered at Fifty-Fifth Executive Council Meeting and for the comprehensive briefing provided by the FFM's leadership. We were dismayed, however, by the unjustified criticism of the FFM's methodology related to its report on the 4 April Khan Shaykhun incident. Worse yet, in a clearly tendentious and persistent line of argumentation, the Russian Federation strenuously suggested that the horrendous death and human suffering inflicted by the sarin attack on Khan Shaykhun were not real, but just a staged fabrication. At least, when pressed regarding this dismal attempt at misdirection, the Russian Federation ultimately acknowledged that the FFM had correctly confirmed that the nerve agent sarin or a sarin-like substance was used in Khan Shaykhun. Given this admission, what are we to make of these relentless attacks on the FFM investigation? We believe the objective was simple and cynical – to try to substitute confusion and controversy for the clear and incontestable findings of the FFM.

In other words, such protest was simply sound and fury signifying nothing. Apparently, some believe that the members of this Executive Council can be easily confused and confounded by phony arguments and empty rhetoric. The best way for the Russian Federation to avoid having to deal with such reports in the future would be, as Secretary Tillerson stated on 5 July, for it to live up to its obligation to prevent any further use of chemical weapons of any kind by the Assad regime.



I will now turn to a Syria-related issue that the United States of America did not address at the recent Executive Council meeting. Earlier this year, the Technical Secretariat conducted a first inspection at the Barzah and Jamrayah facilities of the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Centre (SSRC) – in fulfilment of the Executive Council’s 11 November 2016 decision. The inspection team reported that it did not observe any activities inconsistent with obligations under the Convention. Ordinarily, such a report could contribute to the confidence that SSRC facilities were no longer involved in Syria’s chemical weapons programme. However, Syria’s refusal - for unsubstantiated security issues - and contrary to the positive assessment of the United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) -to comply with the inspection dates notified by the Technical Secretariat, engendered further concerns, rather than confidence, in Syria’s good faith and commitment to fulfilling its obligations. Given Syria’s history of obfuscation, deception, and denial, it is entirely reasonable for us to assume that Syria used the nearly month-long delay to remove incriminating evidence from the SSRC facilities.

The first SSRC inspection also did not address or resolve the long-standing concern that Syria has failed to fully declare the activities at the SSRC. Syria continues to deny the research and development role of these facilities in its chemical weapons programme despite forensic sampling evidence gathered by the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT), which indicated that Syria worked on a host of nerve and blister agents at SSRC facilities.

This Executive Council continues to grapple with the issue of non-State actor use of chemical weapons. In advance of this session, the co-sponsors of the draft Executive Council decision entitled “Addressing the Threat Posed by the Use of Chemical Weapons by Non-State Actors” have tabled a revised decision text in light of comments from, and consultations with, other delegations. The United States of America stands ready to work with Executive Council members to see that this decision is adopted by consensus. The United States of America attaches great importance to this decision and considers Executive Council action on the issue of non-State actor use of chemical weapons to be urgent and necessary. Non-State actor interest in using chemical weapons poses a great threat to international security, and no country on this Executive Council is immune to the threat. This decision identifies concrete actions States Parties and the OPCW Executive Council can take to address that threat now. Let us not muddy the decision with political agendas, but instead coalesce around the shared goal of thwarting non-State actor acquisition, development, and use which is the focus of the current text.

At this session, the Executive Council will begin the process of selecting the next Director-General of the OPCW. The United States of America expresses its appreciation for all those States Parties that nominated candidates. Let me also express our appreciation to you, the Chairperson of the Executive Council, Ambassador Belal, for overseeing and guiding the Director-General selection process. We fully support your efforts to ensure complete transparency of the process and your decision to follow the informal procedures successfully utilised by the Executive Council in 2009 to achieve a consensus recommendation to the Conference of the States Parties. Let us all pledge to work together to identify and recommend, as we did in 2009, an individual that embodies the diplomatic skills, managerial competence, and personal integrity needed to lead the OPCW into the next decade.

In April, the United States of America hosted the visit of an Executive Council delegation to our chemical weapons destruction facilities in Blue Grass, Kentucky. The delegation

received briefings from numerous programme officials and toured both the Blue Grass Chemical Agent Destruction Pilot Plant (BGCAPP) main plant and Static Detonation Chamber facilities. In Washington, the Council delegation engaged in productive discussions with officials from the U.S. National Authority, Defense Department, Department of Commerce and National Security Council. We are pleased that the delegation concluded in its report that, “the United States attaches great importance to meeting its obligations under the Convention and remains fully committed to completing destruction of its remaining chemical weapons stockpile...in the shortest time practicable.”

The United States of America continues to actively engage in the ongoing work of the Open-Ended Working Group on Future Priorities. We fully support the leadership of the Co-Chairs in this endeavour, and have appreciated the presentations and discussions of the sessions held to date. We encourage all States Parties to attend future sessions of the working group and to provide recommendations and feedback into this process. This working group will be an important complement to the preparations for the upcoming Fourth Review Conference. We look forward to continuing our participation in its work.

We find ourselves at this session of the Executive Council to be at a crossroads. Important challenges for the future are before us – continuing the efforts of the Open-Ended Working Group on Future Priorities, preparing for the Fourth Review Conference, positioning the Organisation to address more effectively the threat of chemical weapons use by non-State actors, and countering the insidious threat posed by the use of central nervous system-acting chemicals like fentanyl, under the guise of a legitimate law enforcement purpose.

However, even as we endeavour to prepare for the difficult road ahead of us, this Executive Council and the Organisation itself remain mired in the seemingly unending Syrian chemical weapons crisis. This September, it will have been four years since the Executive Council and the United Nations Security Council took historic action in the hope of eliminating all chemical weapons in Syria. We must all recognise that this hope has not yet been realised. The long-suffering Syrian people continue to endure chemical weapons attacks by the Assad regime and the so-called Islamic State.

As we contemplate the future, we should all recognise that the Executive Council’s action or inaction with respect to the Syrian chemical weapons crisis will, by far, do more to shape the destiny of this Organisation – for good or ill – than any working groups or Review Conferences. In addressing this crisis, the Executive Council will define the character, reputation, and relevance of the OPCW for years to come. Let us act with the courage of shared conviction and move closer to a world free of chemical weapons. Let us take care not to set the clock back twenty years and undo the extraordinary progress we have made under the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Mr Chairperson, while I have the floor, let me reaffirm U.S. support for the French-German declaration.

Thank you, Mr Chairperson.

I ask that this statement be an official document of the session and posted on both the external server and the public website.

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