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RUSSIAN FEDERATION

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR A.V. SHULGIN
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION TO THE OPCW
AT THE EIGHTY-FIFTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairperson,

The delegation of the Russian Federation is pleased to once again welcome you as the head of the Executive Council (hereinafter “the Council”) and would like to assure you of our full support and willingness to cooperate constructively in order to ensure that this session is as successful as possible.

The Russian Federation is fully dedicated to its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention (hereinafter “the Convention”) and has consistently been progressing with the destruction of its stockpiles of chemical weapons. As at 10 July 2017, a total of 39,659 tonnes of chemical weapons—99.2% of the initial stockpile—has been destroyed. The elimination of the remaining quantity is being carried out on schedule at the last operating facility in Kizner, in the Udmurt Republic.

We continue to attentively follow the status of the destruction of chemical weapons in other States Parties. We found the visits arranged for Council delegations during the intersessional period—to the Blue Grass chemical weapons destruction facility in the United States of America and the Haerbaling site for the destruction of chemical weapons abandoned by Japan on the territory of China—to be useful from the standpoint of keeping abreast of the latest state of affairs.

The Russian Federation has taken note of the reports by the Director-General on the implementation of the plan for the destruction of the remaining Libyan Category 2 chemical weapons outside of that country, as well as the report by Libya on the progress achieved in destroying stockpiles of chemical weapons remaining since 29 April 2012.

We would like to once again draw attention to the as of yet unresolved issue of the “deficit” of 220 tonnes of chemical weapons precursors at the Ruwagha facility in Libya. In line with the instructions issued by the Eighty-Third Session of the Executive Council to the Technical Secretariat (hereinafter “the Secretariat”), it is necessary that a fully-fledged inspection of the facility be carried out as soon as possible, including a direct visit to the site and collection of the requisite samples. The security situation in the area near the facility, according to our information, is far from being so critical so as to pose any difficulties for a visit. We recommend working with the authorities in Tobruk who, as far as we know, are the ones in



control of the territory adjacent to the Ruwagha facility, in order to join efforts to ensure secure access to said facility.

We note the regular reports by the Director-General, as well as the documents submitted by the Syrian Arab Republic on the elimination of the Syrian military chemical capability over the last reporting period, demonstrating clear progress in this area. We are pleased to note that in June 2017, the last aircraft hangar from former chemical weapons production facilities was destroyed in the presence of OPCW experts.

We have also noted the report by the Director-General on the results of an inspection of the facilities of the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Centre (SSRC) located in Barzah and Jamrayah; this inspection was conducted in line with the decision of the Eighty-Third Session of the Council. We would like to point out that in spite of the known circumstances related to this decision—which is politically motivated in nature—and the complex security situation in the region, the Government of Syria, in a spirit of good faith, was able to organise a visit by Secretariat experts to the SSRC facilities. The results of the visit, according to the report, speak for themselves: the Syrian Arab Republic provided the necessary cooperation and ensured that the inspectors had full access to all of the buildings and structures of interest; an analysis of the samples that were collected there showed the absence of any traces of scheduled chemicals; no signs of any activities contradictory to Syria's obligations under the Convention were detected.

We believe in the importance of maintaining a consistent, continuous dialogue between the Secretariat and Syrian experts under the aegis of Director-General Mr A. Üzümcü and Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister Mr F. Mekdad, with an aim to clarify the situation surrounding the Syria's initial declaration under the Convention. We believe that this format for cooperation between the OPCW and Syria has proven to be effective. We note the extensive readiness demonstrated by the Syrians to maintain contact with the Secretariat.

At its special meeting on 5 July 2017, the Council reviewed the reports on the results of the Fact-Finding Mission's (FFM) investigation into the use of chemical weapons in Syria in two incidents: one in the village of Um-Housh on 16 September 2016, and the second in Khan Shaykhun on 4 April 2017. The Russian delegation has provided an in-depth explanation of its assessment of the work performed by the FFM, and has circulated the relevant materials, which are available for everyone to review.

When it comes to the remarks that have been voiced here with accusations insinuating that Russia and Syria have put up a “smokescreen”, spinning the facts in the Khan Shaykhun report, my response in short is that these speculations do not have a leg to stand on—and I will explain why.

Anyone putting up a “smokescreen” typically does so when they have something to hide. Russia and Syria have nothing to hide. I would remind you that it was Russia that proposed—even before 21 April 2017—urgently sending OPCW experts to Khan Shaykhun and the al-Shayrat airbase in order to figure out what really happened there. We were told: don't make any unfounded accusations against the FFM, it has its own work approach. Wait for the report.

Finally, the report was released, prepared by the FFM, which was working remotely and using highly dubious data. The report leads readers to believe there was an air strike. Yet with all this, the FFM is somehow unable to determine what kind of munition was used. The

fragments of the munition that were sticking out from the site of impact—we all saw them in video clips—have somehow disappeared. The FFM just took this for granted: well, what do you want? The munition fragments could not be retrieved—that's that. We didn't get an explanation any clearer than that. And so, the munition fragments were “secreted away” and the impact site was filled up with cement. It's quite a challenge to see this as anything other than the destruction of critical material evidence. So sure, the “smokescreen” worked a treat after all.

As regards the video clip of the children dying—presumably from sarin—the FFM leaders explain that the experts did not even analyse this media as they did not consider it to be primary evidence. In other words: why are you splitting hairs over this video? It's all trivial nonsense. But excuse me, whose photographs were put on view for all to see at the meeting in New York by Ms Haley, the Permanent Representative of the United States of America? Were these not the very same children? Did she not see those as nonsense unrelated to the matter at hand? Then we go from bad to worse. On 6 April 2017 at an official meeting of the OPCW delegation with the staff of the State Department, we were told that President Trump of the United States of America became “unbelievably infuriated” upon seeing scenes of dying children. It is said that it was this report that moved him to take the decision to launch the airstrike on the al-Shayrat airbase in Syria.

But since you confirm—and by ‘you’, I mean our opponents—that the video is not critical material evidence relating to the incident in Khan Shaykhun, then this means that the president of a superpower took a critically important decision to launch missiles based merely on some trivial information. And if that is in fact what happened, then you should have distanced yourselves from the American decision, which was a gross violation of international law and an act of aggression against the sovereign State of the Syrian Arab Republic.

So why didn't that happen? Those who are currently attempting to find us at fault for unscrupulously criticising the work of the FFM have, as one, and in a friendly manner—although with some provisos—spoken in favour of the American act of force against Syria, and lauded it in every way possible as a reliable means of preventing any recurrence of the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian army.

So then why did you object so strongly to our proposal to send experts to the al-Shayrat airbase where, according to the Americans' assertion, chemical weapons were stored? Something clearly “does not hold water” here when it comes to the conclusions of our Western colleagues. The result? Inconsistencies everywhere.

Let us return to the children with the dilated pupils. We never did get a rational answer to the question of why the FFM did not include them in their table of symptoms suffered by the casualties of the sarin attack. The report itemises exact numbers for incidents of diarrhoea, vomiting, and pupils contracted to the size of a pin's head (137 people in total). What about the children with the dilated pupils? After all, their number was not inconsequential. Perhaps they were not included in the table because they didn't die from sarin? But if that is the case, then what or who killed them? Who will answer these questions?

Furthermore, this video clip was submitted by the very same “White Helmets”, who later provided materials that the FFM willingly accepted and worked with. One wonders why the FFM accepted some of these materials without a second thought, but downright rejected

others? Could it be that they did not fit the premeditated narrative in which the perpetrators have already been designated?

We have no illusions about how our conclusions will be received by politically motivated delegations. The degree to which they are independent in their judgments can be measured by their statements alone: each national statement by Member States of the European Union begins with a ritualistic incantation of how that country fully aligns itself with the statement previously voiced on behalf of the EU. We present our explanations for consideration by the delegations capable of viewing things objectively.

Unlike our colleagues singing out “Hosanna” in praise of the professionalism and impeccable work of the FFM, we will continue to ask questions as we deem necessary. We will insist on establishing the complete picture of what has happened in order to determine not only those who carried it out, but also those who arranged and inspired this reprehensible crime. We have no doubt that this is an open, flagrant provocation carried out by adversaries of the legitimate Syrian authorities.

We believe that the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) in Syria will continue a truly comprehensive investigation, with on-site visits—not only to Khan Shaykhun, but to the al-Shayrat airbase as well—and will work in a professional and unbiased manner.

That said, we must not forget about the need to inspect the al-Shayrat airbase, from where—according to our American colleagues—the aircraft carrying chemical weapons allegedly took off. We will insist on a visit to the airbase by JIM experts.

Unfortunately, the problem of the possession and use of chemical weapons by non-State actors is becoming ever more relevant. Terrorist groups now have real potential to produce and use this type of weapon. The fact that terrorists have these weapons has been confirmed by FFM experts and the Russian specialists who have visited the sites of chemical incidents in Syria. With regard to the incident involving chemical weapons in the village of Um-Housh in particular, everything indicates that the responsibility for the use of chemical weapons lies with terrorists.

We welcome the increasingly active work of the OPCW in countering these threats. As the discussion in the Open-Ended Working Group on Terrorism and its Sub-Working Group on Non-State Actors has shown, the Organisation—within the scope of its mandate—is capable of taking the appropriate measures to provide assistance to help grow the relevant capabilities of States Parties to the Convention.

We also believe that it is important to expand the relevant capabilities of the Secretariat, in particular those related to responding to information deserving of attention regarding incidents where chemical weapons were used in Syria by terrorist groups, as well as hazardous chemical contraband from neighbouring countries. As far as we are aware, this type of information is received regularly by the Secretariat from the Syrian Arab Republic.

The continued mobilisation of international efforts is necessary in the fight against these unceasing recurrences of chemical terrorism in Syria and Iraq. In this regard, the relevance of the Russian initiative to develop an international convention on the suppression of chemical and biological terrorism was confirmed at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva.

We welcome the discussion on the future priorities of the OPCW, which is now gaining momentum, within the corresponding Open-Ended Working Group. We believe that the evolutionary development of the Organisation must not lead to diminishing the consensus-based principles of the Convention, or impairing the balance among the rights and obligations of States Parties; the Organisation's new areas of activity should not reach beyond the scope of its mandate under the Convention.

The decisive stage of the campaign for the election of the Director-General of the Secretariat is now beginning. Of the seven qualified candidates for this post, the Council will have to make a very difficult choice very soon and select one candidate based on a consensus.

We will submit statements on a number of the items on this session's agenda separately, as they are addressed.

Thank you, Mr Chairperson.

We request that this statement be circulated as an official document of the Eighty-Fifth Session of the Executive Council.

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