

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY



**STATEMENT BY H.E. KENNETH D. WARD**

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United States of America  
to the OPCW**

**at the Eighty-Sixth Session of the Executive Council  
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Mr. Chairman, Mr. Director-General, distinguished ambassadors and delegates,

We understand that the Chair's informal consultations regarding the next Director-General have been successful and that a consensus has emerged in support of a candidate to be formally recommended by the Council to the Conference of the States Parties. The U.S. delegation extends our best wishes to His Excellency Ambassador Fernando Arias of Spain and pledges its full support to his appointment as the next Director-General at the Twenty-Second Conference of the States Parties in November.

The United States expresses its appreciation to all States Parties that nominated candidates and commends each of the candidates for his professionalism during the selection process.

The United States congratulates our distinguished Chair, His Excellency Ambassador Belal of Bangladesh, for his exemplary efforts in overseeing and guiding the Director-General selection process. The United States considered it paramount that every effort be made to reach consensus on a candidate recommendation to the Conference of the States Parties. Thanks to Ambassador Belal's diplomatic skill and Council members' shared commitment to work together to this end, we can all be rightfully proud of the consensus that has been achieved. Let me also now personally thank you, Ambassador Belal, and all Council delegations, for your constructive engagement and dedication in advancing the selection process to a successful outcome.

Mr. Chairman,

Another grim milestone has just been passed in the continuing Syrian chemical weapons crisis. It has now been four years since this Council adopted its historic decision on the destruction of Syrian chemical weapons and since the UN Security Council adopted resolution 2118. The shared vision of this Council and the UN Security Council was to disarm the Syrian government of all of its chemical weapons quickly and completely and end the threat of chemical weapons use by the Assad regime. The harsh and unrelenting truth is that, four years later, the Syrian Arab Republic, a State Party, not only continues to possess, but has also used chemical weapons in defiance of the Convention, the decisions of this Council, and UN Security Council resolutions.

In advance of this session, the Director-General reported to the Council that a wide range of issues related to Syria's declaration of its chemical weapons program remain unresolved. This report details compelling evidence – much of it from forensic sampling analysis – that Syria has not declared its entire chemical weapons program. Most alarming are the clear indications that Syria has produced and continues to possess stocks of nerve agent and its immediate precursor chemicals. Syria's use of nerve agent in its April 4th attack on Khan Shaykhun should remove any doubt that the Assad regime continues to harbor an undeclared chemical weapons stockpile.

The Director-General has also reported that none of the many outstanding issues related to Syria's declaration were resolved following his September meeting with Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister Mekdad. Delegations should recall that, in July 2016, after meeting with Deputy Foreign Minister Mekdad, the Director-General reported to the Council that “a continuation of this effort without a change in the approach by the Syrian Arab Republic to resolve all of the outstanding issues related to its declaration is unlikely to yield concrete

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results.” With respect to the Director-General’s recent meeting with Deputy Foreign Minister Mekdad, there is no reason to believe that Syria has adopted such a change in approach; on the contrary, Syria appears more than ever determined to continue its contemptible charade.

In his August 1 letter extending an invitation to another round of senior-level consultations, the Director-General reiterated his request that Syria send a senior official from its chemical weapons program, and further requested that Syria, in advance of these consultations, submit additional information and documents that would indisputably clarify the remaining declaration issues. Syria continues to refuse to honor the Director-General’s request to meet with a senior official from Syria’s chemical weapons program. Syria still refuses to provide the Secretariat with information and original documentation which could resolve the many declaration discrepancies identified by the OPCW Declaration Assessment Team (DAT). Syria still continues to deny that the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Center (SSRC) was at the very center of all of its chemical weapons R&D activities, as concluded by the Secretariat. In sum, Syria’s deplorable pattern of denial and obfuscation continues unabated.

Mr. Chairman,

The Director-General agreed to meet with Deputy Foreign Minister Mekdad in response to persistent demands from the Syrian government. For the Director-General, this effort was intended to be a constructive diplomatic engagement. For Syria, however, it was a calculated ploy intended to conceal, behind a political smokescreen, its deliberate refusal to declare all of its chemical weapons. We commend the Director-General for his good-faith efforts. However, Syria’s blatant attempt to manipulate this engagement for nefarious political purposes cannot be tolerated. Never again should Syria be allowed to exploit the declaration assessment process and involve the Technical Secretariat in its continuing conspiracy to deceive the international community and defy the Convention. The burden going forward must be on Syria to finally demonstrate good faith.

The Director-General has also reported to this Council that the analysis of samples from an incident on March 30 of this year in Hama conclusively indicates the presence of sarin nerve agent. This attack preceded the now infamous sarin attack by the Syrian government on Khan Shaykhun by five days – contributing to the pattern of chemical weapons use by the Assad regime. We understand that the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission is preparing a report and we request that every effort be made to complete this report as soon as possible.

Mr. Chairman,

Four years have gone by, and the Syrian chemical weapons crisis has not abated; in fact, it has intensified. The work of this Council and that of the UN Security Council will not be done until all chemical weapons are removed from Syrian hands and those responsible for the use of chemical weapons are held accountable for their actions.

Mr. Chairman,

The United States continues to support efforts to reach consensus on a Council decision regarding the threat of chemical weapons use by non-State actors. We hope that the pending draft decision, that currently has 18 co-sponsors, can be adopted during this Council session. In the intersessional period, co-sponsors worked diligently to update the text to reflect input of

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concerned EC members and tabled a revision today. It allows the Council to address the shared concern related to non-State actor acquisition, development, and use of chemical weapons, and allows us to begin collectively the important work of implementation.

Mr. Chairman,

The United States continues to meet all of its obligations to complete destruction of its chemical weapons stockpile under the Convention and relevant Executive Council and Conference of the State Parties decisions. We remain on track to meet our planned completion date.

Mr. Chairman,

The United States continues to engage actively in the ongoing work of the Open-Ended Working Group on Future Priorities. We fully support the leadership of the Co-Chairs in this endeavor, 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 is an important complement to the preparations for the upcoming Fourth Review Conference. We look forward to continuing our participation in this important undertaking.

Mr. Chairman,

The United States expresses its appreciation to Sweden for its efforts to prepare a draft decision with respect to the rehiring of inspectors. It is essential that the Technical Secretariat continues to maintain the requisite skills and expertise to meet OPCW operational requirements and to serve as an international repository of chemical weapons knowledge.

Mr. Chairman,

Last week, Malaysian authorities began the trial of two foreign nationals charged with the murder of a North Korean national, Kim Jong-nam, the half-brother of North Korean leader, Kim Jong-un. Media reports and court documents have reported four North Korean nationals are allegedly connected to the attack, all of whom fled Malaysia afterward. In a decision taken on March 9, 2017, the Executive Council underlined the importance it attaches to receiving and considering the official results of the investigation of this incident by the Government of Malaysia. Since the trial is now underway, it is evident that the official investigation into the use of VX is mature. We believe the Council would benefit from an update on this matter.

The use of the nerve agent VX and indications of the involvement of the government of North Korea in the assassination of Kim Jong-nam raise very serious concerns about the chemical weapons capabilities of, and the threat posed by, the government of North Korea – a state not party to the Chemical Weapons Convention. Upon receipt of the investigation report from the Government of Malaysia, the Executive Council should convene on an expedited basis to review the report and consider appropriate actions.

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Mr. Chairman,

In closing, as we contemplate the appointment of the next Director-General, I would take this opportunity to acknowledge the dedication and accomplishments of our current Director-General. Over the last seven years, His Excellency Ambassador Ahmet Uzumcu has distinguished himself and distinguished the enlightened enterprise that is the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. We all owe him, and indeed the world owes him, an enormous debt of gratitude for his unrelenting efforts in pursuit of a world free of chemical weapons.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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