



OPCW

Executive Council

Fifty-Eighth Meeting
16 April 2018

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NOTE BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL

**OPENING STATEMENT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL TO THE
EXECUTIVE COUNCIL AT ITS FIFTY-EIGHTH MEETING**

Mr Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

Thank you for giving me the floor. I would like to update the Council on the work of the Technical Secretariat with regards to the allegations of chemical weapons' use in Douma, the Syrian Arab Republic on Saturday 7 April 2018.

The OPCW Situation Centre picked up news of allegations of the use of toxic chemicals in Douma on Saturday evening and started following it closely. They gathered more information and made an initial assessment in consultation with our experts. According to their preliminary analysis these allegations were considered to be credible and required further investigation.

We undertook internal discussions at the Secretariat for a possible deployment of a Fact-Finding Team to Douma. On Monday 9 April an FFM team comprised of nine inspectors with relevant expertise was set up. Some of the team members were called back from other missions and training courses. They have all volunteered for this mission.

On Tuesday 10 April, we handed to the Syrian delegation a note verbale notifying them of our decision to deploy the FFM as early as possible, as well as the names of the team members for issuance of visas. On the same day, the Syrian delegation submitted to the Secretariat a note verbale requesting the FFM to be dispatched. We also received a letter from the Ambassador of the Russian Federation supporting the Syrian request. Following these communications which are circulated to the States Parties on 10 April, I received a letter from the Syrian Vice Foreign Minister expressing his government's support for the deployment of the FFM.

The Secretariat sent a follow-up note verbale on Wednesday 11 April to the Syrian Arab Republic underscoring the need to ensure that the cooperation is provided in a manner which is fully consistent with the Terms of Reference of the FFM, relevant decisions of the Council, and resolutions of the UN Security Council.

Meanwhile the UN Secretary-General called me on Tuesday 10 April and expressed full support for the work of the OPCW in Syria and promised to provide all assistance that we may need. I have also been in touch with the UN High Representative for Disarmament



Affairs, Ms Nakamitsu. Colleagues in the Secretariat and the UNOPS office in Damascus have been – and continue to be – in close contact with the UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) in order to ensure the safety of the FFM team.

I have addressed a letter to the Director-General of the World Health Organisation (WHO) requesting that the WHO share with us information on the victims it reportedly collected through its partners on the ground.

An advance group of three experts from the FFM arrived in Beirut on Thursday, while the remaining six members joined them on Friday. The full team received a security briefing from UNDSS in Beirut on Friday. On Saturday the team proceeded to Damascus, where they met with officials of the National Authority to work out a plan for the deployment.

The Team has not yet deployed to Douma. The Syrian and the Russian officials who participated in the preparatory meetings in Damascus have informed the FFM Team that there were still pending security issues to be worked out before any deployment could take place.

In the meantime the Team was offered by the Syrian authorities that they could interview 22 witnesses who could be brought to Damascus.

I hope that all necessary arrangements will be made through the UNDSS to allow the team to deploy to Douma as soon as possible.

Finally I would request the States Parties, in a position to do so, to share any information on the reported incident with the Technical Secretariat.

This concludes my update.

Thank you.

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