



OPCW

Executive Council

Thirty-Third Meeting
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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

**STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR ROBERT P. MIKULAK
UNITED STATES DELEGATION
TO THE THIRTY-THIRD MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairman,

By any measure, this meeting of the Executive Council is the most important held in the 16-year history of the Chemical Weapons Convention. Everything about the matter we address here today is extraordinary. After years of denial, the Assad regime has finally admitted to the international community that it possesses a chemical weapons stockpile; a stockpile present in a State ravaged by a more than two-year long civil war that has already claimed more than 100,000 lives. What the regime continues to deny to the world is the lives it has taken over the last year through the use of chemical weapons against its own people. Only a month ago, on 21 August, regime forces unleashed the nerve agent sarin against an opposition-controlled suburb of Damascus killing 1,400 innocent men, women, and children. The report by the United Nations Investigation Mission conclusively found that sarin was used in this brutal incident. The Head of the United Nations Mission, Dr Åke Sellström, noted that “[t]his result leaves us with the deepest concern.”

Just three weeks ago, in the wake of the horrifying events of 21 August, the United States and the Russian Federation undertook an intensive diplomatic effort to prevent further use of chemical weapons in Syria. Secretary Kerry and his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov were able to find common ground through the same vision that binds us all as States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention—our commitment, for the sake of all mankind, to exclude completely the possibility of the use of chemical weapons. On 14 September, this diplomatic initiative successfully yielded the “Framework for the Elimination of Syrian Chemical Weapons.”

The Kerry-Lavrov framework provided fundamental principles and an ambitious plan for eliminating the Assad regime’s chemical weapons programme, which are now embedded in the decision adopted by this Executive Council on 27 September as well as in the United Nations Security Council resolution adopted the same day. It is uncertain, however, whether the regime will follow through and faithfully implement those requirements. Let us not forget that just one month ago, the Syrian regime gassed civilians in a Damascus suburb in blatant violation of international law. Prudence requires that we be both determined and circumspect, hopeful and cautious.

* Reissued for technical reasons.



Since its inception, the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention has been predicated upon the assumed good faith of new States Parties. In this extraordinary case, however, good faith cannot and should not be assumed. It would be foolhardy while leaving the people of Syria at a continued risk of chemical attack if we were to simply assume that Syria has, in but a single month, undergone a heartfelt moral and political transformation. Certainly, public outrage, the threat of military action and international pressure have been the most critical factors in prompting the apparent shift in the calculus of the Syrian Government.

By using chemical weapons, the Assad regime chose a path that is repugnant to the conscience of mankind. On 14 September, the regime deposited its instrument of accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention with the United Nations Secretary-General, and expressed its intention to be bound immediately pending the Convention's entry into force for Syria. On 19 September, it submitted preliminary information to the OPCW Technical Secretariat regarding its chemical weapons programme. The United States acknowledges the importance of Syria's actions in this regard, but with guarded optimism. Syria, however, has ascended only the first rungs of the ladder. We must with open eyes see if it truly intends to climb the rest of the way. The next few weeks will be an important test of Syria's commitment to the decision the Council has adopted, to its obligations under the resolution of the United Nations Security Council, and to the obligations under the Convention.

-- By 4 October, Syria must submit to the Technical Secretariat further and more detailed information on its chemical weapons programme to supplement the information it provided on 19 September.

-- By 27 October, Syria must submit to the Technical Secretariat the very comprehensive declaration required under Articles III and VI of the Convention.

-- Also by 27 October, Syria must submit a general destruction plan for its chemical weapons programme. Given the expedited destruction timelines embedded in the Executive Council decision, this plan will need to be detailed and comprehensive, especially with respect to the destruction of production and mixing/filling equipment which must be completed by 1 November under OPCW verification.

-- OPCW inspectors are now in Syria to conduct inspections at all chemical weapons facilities in Syria. It remains to be seen if Syria will fully cooperate with the OPCW and accord inspectors the immediate and unfettered right of access to any and all sites mandated by the Council decision and the Security Council resolution.

Last Friday night, the OPCW Executive Council—followed shortly thereafter by the United Nations Security Council—turned the promise of the framework between Russia and the United States into an international plan for achieving the complete elimination of all chemical weapons in Syria. This is a truly historic development. However, effective verification and vigilant commitment on the part of the Technical Secretariat, the Executive Council, and all the States Parties to the Convention will be essential to successfully complete the journey to a Syria completely free of chemical weapons.

The hope that the 21st century would be unsullied by the scourge of chemical weapons has been wiped away by Syria's heinous actions. Let us all work to realise the hope of the Syrian people and, indeed, of all people, that no one will ever die again in a cloud of poison gas.

I would like to request that this statement be circulated as an official document of the Thirty-Third Meeting of the Council.

Thank you.

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