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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR ROBERT P. MIKULAK
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
TO THE OPCW AT THE FORTY-FOURTH MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairman,

I would like to begin by thanking Director-General Üzümcü and Special Coordinator Kaag for their respective reports on the progress in the elimination of Syrian chemical weapons.

Just a little over a year ago, on 21 August 2013, more than one thousand Syrian civilians were killed in attacks by Syrian military forces using nerve gas in a suburb of Damascus. Those horrific attacks provoked strong condemnation from the international community and sustained international pressure to ensure that Syria's chemical weapons would no longer threaten its own citizens or its neighbours.

The primary responsibility for ensuring that Syria is complying with its obligations regarding the elimination of its chemical weapons programme has fallen to the OPCW-UN Joint Mission, to the OPCW itself, and to the Chemical Weapons Convention Member States. In the last twelve months an important international effort has made significant progress towards meeting that objective. The men and women of the Joint Mission and the Technical Secretariat rose to the challenge and demonstrated their bravery, expertise, professionalism and commitment. Many States made in-kind or financial contributions. For its part, the Executive Council has devoted an extraordinary level of attention to ensuring that the elimination process is carried out consistent with the Convention, the United Nations Security Council resolution 2118 (2013), and the decisions of this Council.

Ten days ago, on 18 August, the United States finished neutralising the most dangerous chemicals in Syria's declared arsenal aboard the M/V Cape Ray, under stringent verification by a team of OPCW inspectors. President Obama stressed that this milestone "further advances our collective goal to ensure that the Assad regime cannot use its chemical arsenal against the Syrian people and sends a clear message that the use of these abhorrent weapons has consequences and will not be tolerated by the international community." President Obama also expressed his gratitude to Director-General Üzümcü, Special Coordinator Kaag, and the entire international coalition for this extraordinary achievement.

I want to reiterate that appreciation to the OPCW and the Joint Mission. Without your



extraordinary coordination and effort we could not have achieved what we have. In his statement on 18 August, President Obama also made clear that the task of ensuring that Syria's chemical weapons programme has been entirely eliminated is far from over. He said that "we will watch carefully to see that Syria fulfils its commitment to destroy its remaining declared chemical weapons production facilities." The US Delegation welcomes the information in the Director-General's report today regarding meetings that have taken place on detailed implementation planning. We are concerned, however, that the work to begin destruction may be somewhat delayed. We look forward to a report from the Director-General at the regular session of the Council in early October indicating that destruction of the aircraft hangars has already begun and that the destruction of the tunnels will begin by the end of October, as required by the Council's decision on 24 July 2014. We urge that all effort be made to accelerate the work in order to meet this timeline.

President Obama also stressed that "serious questions remain with respect to the omissions and discrepancies in Syria's declaration to the OPCW." The Syrian declaration on its very face contains gaps, discrepancies, and inconsistencies, which give rise to important questions and concerns about the declaration's accuracy and completeness. Previous discussions have made clear that concerns about such problems in the declaration are widely shared in the Council. The burden lies squarely on Syria to build international confidence that it has declared its entire chemical weapons programme. The United States strongly supports the intensive efforts by the Technical Secretariat to clarify Syria's declaration and we expect Syria to fully cooperate. We would request that the Secretariat to report on these efforts in advance of the next session of the Executive Council in October.

The United States also remains deeply concerned with credible indications that Syria again has been using chemical weapons, as it did last August and in prior incidents, this time reportedly including the use of chlorine in attacks against the opposition. The preliminary findings of the Technical Secretariat's Fact-Finding Mission and the just released report from the independent international commission of inquiry on Syria heighten these concerns. Most recently, just a few days ago, the independent commission reported that "reasonable grounds exist to believe that chemical agents, likely chlorine, were used ... within a 10-day period in April." It also said that "there are also reasonable grounds to believe that those agents were dropped in barrel bombs from government helicopters flying overhead."

The United States commends the courage and dedication of the Fact-Finding Mission and the Independent Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic for its professional and impartial efforts to ascertain the facts regarding chemical weapons use in Syria. We join the rest of the international community in strongly supporting the Director-General's decision to have the Fact-Finding Mission continue with its investigation to get to the bottom of these attacks. We also urge the Fact-Finding Mission to report on its progress in advance of the next session of this Council in October.

A week ago the world marked the one year anniversary of the Syrian government's deadly chemical weapons attacks against its own people. Out of this atrocity was born the international effort to disarm Syria of its chemical weapons programme. One year later, through the decisions taken by this Council and a broad international effort, the international community has removed and destroyed the most lethal of Syria's declared chemical weapons. But we owe it to the people of Syria, as well as to all of mankind, to persevere until the job is finished.

In closing, I would like to request that the full text of this statement be circulated as an official document of the Forty-Fourth meeting of the Council, and posted in the OPCW external server and public website.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.

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