



OPCW

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Forty-Fifth Meeting
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UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND

**STATEMENT BY H.E. SIR GEOFFREY ADAMS
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND AT THE
FORTY-FIFTH MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairman,

The United Kingdom aligns itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union by your colleague, the representative of Italy. I will take this opportunity to make a few additional points.

I am, as ever, grateful to the Director-General for his briefing on this important issue.

I am also grateful to the Chair for convening this meeting of the Executive Council today: this Council cannot overlook that the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission has issued a report confirming that chemical weapons have been used in Syria, following that country's accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention. The fact that previously unsubstantiated allegations of chemical weapons use have been independently corroborated by this Organisation presents us with a challenge. Any use of toxic chemicals as a weapon in Syria is a grave contravention of both the Chemical Weapons Convention and United Nations Security Council resolution 2118 (2013) and requires a firm response. It is essential therefore, for the Executive Council to consider this report and next steps.

The Fact-Finding Mission's report is, we think, clear in its findings. In particular, we would like to draw attention, as the Director-General did himself this morning, to the conclusions which note the wide range of individuals that were interviewed, including victims, medical professionals and eye witnesses. The report considers that the evidence collected,

"...constitutes a compelling confirmation that a toxic chemical was used as a weapon, systematically and repeatedly, in the villages of Talmanes, Al Tamanah, and Kafr Zeta in northern Syria..." and to conclude, "... with a high degree of confidence, that chlorine, either pure or in mixture is the toxic chemical in question."

The report also notes that witnesses "invariably" described the attacks as being linked to the presence of helicopters flying overhead.

While the report is not explicit as to which party committed these acts, it is a widely known fact, as has been noted, that none of the opposition elements in Syria possesses helicopters.



Even if opposition elements had access to this kind of hardware, it would be near on impossible for them to conduct these kinds of attacks without coming under fire from Syria's air defenses. With such a large number of people "invariably" connecting attacks to helicopters, and the attacks themselves taking place in opposition controlled areas, it is simply not credible to conclude that any party other than the Assad regime is responsible.

The United Kingdom condemns this continued use of chemical weapons as a weapon of war – and let us be clear that the use of chlorine in this way does indeed constitute a chemical weapon in the terms of the Convention. While allegations of chemical use in Syria are continuing to be made, with several new incidents just this week, Syria of course cannot be treated as a normal State Party to this Convention. We also believe that these attacks cannot pass without comment by the Executive Council, or we would be tacitly accepting them, and therefore undermining the Convention.

The continuing use of chemical weapons in Syria also serves to emphasise the importance of resolving all concerns about gaps and discrepancies in Syria's declarations to the OPCW. The Syrian regime's claims of full disclosure and co-operation with the OPCW ring hollow while use of chemical weapons continues. It also calls into question their willingness to comply with the obligations they have entered into by acceding to the Convention and places them in contravention of both its terms, and as I said those set by United Nations Security Council resolution 2118 (2013).

So we strongly support the continuation of the Fact-Finding Mission, as the Director-General has told us he intends, given these continuing allegations of use.

Mr Chairman,

We believe that the Executive Council must take effective action to deter and prevent further attacks against the people of Syria and also to hold the Syrian regime accountable. We are ready and willing to discuss with other States Parties what measures might be most effective in preventing any future such use.

Some say that we should wait for a final report from the Fact-Finding Mission before we take this step, but with no sign of the allegations of use stopping that cannot be right – it allows the Syrian regime to manipulate the OPCW's response to their own actions. The Fact-Finding Mission's report is conclusive on the issue of use of chlorine in three places in northern Syria earlier this year, so we can, and should, respond now.

If we do not, the Executive Council, and the whole OPCW, will be failing in their responsibilities to work for the complete prohibition of the use of chemical weapons.

I ask that this statement be circulated as an official document of this Executive Council meeting and published on the OPCW's website.

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