



OPCW

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RUSSIAN FEDERATION

**STATEMENT BY THE DELEGATION OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION AT THE
FORTY-EIGHTH MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairperson,

We are pleased to see you again leading the first meeting of the Executive Council in the New Year, and we would like to wish you, the management of the Technical Secretariat, and all of our colleagues in other delegations a successful and happy 2015.

First of all, please allow me to thank the Director-General for the new information that was presented to us today concerning the progress in the elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme. In this regard, we would like to express our gratitude to all of the staff of the Secretariat involved and note their dedication to the cause and the courage that they demonstrate working in complicated and often dangerous conditions.

Today's meeting is a good reason to take stock of what has been accomplished in terms of the elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme over the past year. We expect that we are voicing a common point of view when we say that the achievements have been outstanding: a State Party's entire chemical weapons stockpile has been eliminated in an unprecedented short period of time, in the very complex conditions of an armed conflict. The elimination of all of the declared materials and equipment for chemical weapons in the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic was completed within the deadlines set out in the Council's decisions and United Nations Security Council resolution 2118; the chemical weapons components removed from the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic have been almost completely destroyed, and the destruction of 12 former chemical weapons production facilities has begun.

Without diminishing the role of the OPCW and its Secretariat, as well as the many States Parties that provided major, large-scale assistance in carrying out the chemical demilitarisation operation in the Syrian Arab Republic, it should be noted that to a great extent this success was possible thanks to the authorities of the Syrian Arab Republic that followed through with these tasks while complying with Convention requirements and the due level of safety, in spite of objective difficulties. I would like to recall that they were caused not only by an internal armed conflict, but also by economic sanctions from a number of States and as a result, insufficient financial, material, and human resources. In this regard, we note with satisfaction that the Director-General's report on the progress in the elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme presented at this meeting once again notes—as before—that the Syrian authorities “continued to extend the necessary cooperation during the reporting period”.



We are also grateful for Mr Anelli's detailed information about the status of the preparations and the start of the destruction of the 12 former chemical weapons production facilities in the Syrian Arab Republic. We are satisfied that over these days, the destruction of the first tunnel is nearing completion, the preparations have started for the destruction of the second tunnel, and that preparations have started for the destruction of the first hangar. Unfortunately, there are some circumstances slowing down these activities, and these arose—and this is perfectly clear from the information of the Secretariat and the Director-General—through absolutely no fault of the Syrian Arab Republic. We hope that the third parties involved in this process will begin to perform their obligations as required, which will remove obstacles for the soonest possible completion of the process of the destruction of the 12 former CWPF in the Syrian Arab Republic, in line with the schedule developed by the OPCW.

As regards the "Syrian dossier", there are still a number of questions related to the clarification of the Syrian Arab Republic's initial declarations under Article III of the Convention. We note the extensive research that has been carried out by the special mission led by Mr Alihodzic. While the findings set out in the mission's second report, which was released only just recently, still must be carefully analysed, we are pleased to see some prospects for resolving a number of problem issues. We noted the wording of the report, according to which the Syrian Arab Republic, by the way, made additional efforts in transparency, provided an enormous amount of additional information that made it possible to resolve many issues relating to the former Syrian chemical weapons programme.

It is reassuring that the Mission is aimed at the constructive continuation of consultations with the Syrian Arab Republic on the remaining problem issues, and that Syria is demonstrating an adequate level of cooperation with the Mission. We would also like to note the intent of Damascus to bring its initial declaration into line with the requirements of the Convention as soon as possible.

As far as the future work of the OPCW Mission is concerned, we hope that it will be done exclusively within the framework of Convention requirements and fully in line with the standards and practices of the Organisation with respect to other States Parties.

We would like to draw the Council's attention to one very important moment. If we are to look back at the general history of the Syrian operation retrospectively, then it would stand to note that progress has been achieved in all areas, without exception. It may not be dramatic in all areas, or it may not always be as fast or tangible as we would like, but there are objective reasons for this. Some of these have been mentioned above: the internal conflict, a lack of resources, and sanctions. Some of them are related to the need to meet Syria's legitimate interests, particularly in national security. But some of the reasons are beyond the control of the Syrian authorities, for example when it comes to entering into contracts with other international agencies. The important thing is that there is progress, and this is an objective fact that should be acknowledged.

We have a few comments about the work of the Fact-Finding Mission to determine the alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria. We have carefully analysed the Mission's most recent report, just as we had done in the case of the two preceding reports. We and other delegations are seriously concerned about the Mission's conclusion that chemical weapons had been used in three settlements in the Syrian Arab Republic in April – May 2014, and that the chemical used was most probably chlorine. In this regard, we believe it is important to

state our decisive and unconditional condemnation of the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere, at any time, and under any circumstances, as an action contradictory to international law and universal morals. It is for this reason that we supported the decision of the Director-General to set up this Mission and we continue to attentively follow its work.

As regards the findings contained in the Mission's reports, we have a number of questions. We have already voiced most of these to the Executive Council, and we do not believe there is a need to repeat them—any interested delegations may review them in the texts of our official statements.

Unfortunately, these questions, comments, and recommendations were not duly accounted for when drawing up the Mission's third report. That is why I will briefly repeat them.

The main weakness in the Mission's work is, in our opinion, a clear skew to the side of subjective—and often inconsistent and not unbiased—witness reports to the detriment of physical proof, made evident by the lack of samples, specimens, chemical analysis results, etc. At the same time, the same physical evidence included in the report—for example, video and photo content—gives rise to major questions regarding its authenticity and relevance.

The materials relating to medical and biological, physical and chemical, and military and technical aspects of the incidents in question are problematic for us in terms of their value as evidence; clearly, in the future, the Secretariat ought to devote more attention to having proper expertise in these areas.

The weakness of the evidence, combined with methodological oversights such as, for example, the absence of proper criteria in selecting witnesses, and the non-transparent procedure for searching for witnesses and assessing the acceptability of their statements, the lack of opinions from all of the parties involved, including the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, among full range of other problems, leaves us no choice but to state that the Mission's reports unfortunately have left us with more questions than answers.

These are the circumstances, in our opinion, that constitute the reason that the Executive Council, despite numerous attempts, could ultimately not reach a consensus on the Mission's reports.

As you know, a draft decision on Reports of the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission produced jointly by the delegations of Russia and the United States of America has been submitted for consideration of the Executive Council.

Without prejudging a possible discussion on this matter, we would like to touch on the Mission's mandate within this very context. As we know, the Mission was established by decision of the Director-General. As the Mission is now coming to the close of an important stage in its work, we believe it would be useful to consider the prospects for and time frame of its future activity, the procedures by which its mandate is defined, and the financial implications within the context of the OPCW's budget, among other things. We believe this discussion is appropriate.

EC-M-48/NAT.1

page 4

We request that this statement be circulated as an official document of the Forty-Eighth Meeting of the Executive Council and published on the Organisation's website.

Thank you, Mr Chairperson

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