



OPCW

Executive Council

Forty-Eighth Meeting
21, 23, 29 January, and 4 February 2015

EC-M-48/NAT.19
4 February 2015
ENGLISH only

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR ROBERT P. MILULAK
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
TO THE OPCW, FOLLOWING THE ADOPTION OF THE DECISION ON THE
REPORTS OF THE OPCW FACT-FINDING MISSION IN SYRIA
AT THE FORTY-EIGHTH MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairman,

Before I begin my prepared statement, I want to thank you, the Director-General and the staff of the Technical Secretariat for the close cooperation that we've enjoyed over the last two weeks of intense discussions. I also want to thank the Russian delegation, which co-sponsored the initial proposal with us, and all of the many other delegations that participated in the discussions, for their cooperation.

The issue before the Council over the last two weeks has been how to react to the reports of the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission, which concluded with high confidence that chlorine has been used as a weapon against three villages in northern Syria. This is probably the most important issue that the Council has considered since the Convention came into force. It touches on the very reason for the existence of the Chemical Weapons Convention and the OPCW, whose Member States are "determined for the sake of all mankind to exclude completely the possibility of the use of chemical weapons," through the implementation of the provisions of the Convention. And how the Council deals with such reports is a test of the credibility of the OPCW and the Convention itself.

The joint draft decision presented by the United States of America and the Russian Federation two weeks ago expressed the collective view of the Council that the use of chemical weapons anywhere, by anyone, at any time is totally unacceptable and to focus attention in particular on the confirmed use of chemical weapons in northern Syria. It was drafted carefully to avoid aspects of the issue that had proven contentious in the Council in 2014.

After the draft proposal was presented it quickly became clear, that with a few tweaks, it would have the support of all but one member of the Council. But recognising the importance attached to consensus in the Council, strenuous efforts were made to accommodate the concerns of one Council member and thereby to achieve consensus. Significant concessions were made by my country and others, resulting in significant changes to the text. That is the text that the Council has before it today.



It is encouraging that the revised wording of the draft decision has the support today of all members of the Council. And it is encouraging that virtually all members of the Council decided today to express their concern formally in the most forceful manner available to the Council – as a formal decision. This message should make clear to those responsible for the confirmed use of chemical weapons in Syria that they will be held accountable for their reprehensible actions. The United States of America joins the other members of the Council in strongly condemning these uses of chemical weapons in Syria. We agree that such uses, anywhere, at any time, by anyone, under any circumstances are unacceptable and would also violate the CWC and UN Security Council resolution 2118 (2013). I believe that by adopting the decision today the Council has lived up to its responsibilities.

It is, of course, very unfortunate that this important decision could not be achieved by consensus, because my delegation shares the very strong desire that the Council be unified on such matters. But it is not for want of effort. For reasons that are hard to understand, one Council member, a country that suffered in recent memory from the use of chemical weapons, sought to prevent the Council from delivering a strong message against the use of chemical weapons. If their advice had been followed and the Council failed to act, the credibility of both the OPCW and the Convention would have been very badly damaged.

The effort to prevent the use of chemical weapons is far from over. Unfortunately, there are more allegations that have yet to be investigated by the Fact-Finding Mission. And once their reports are ready, the Council must address them in a serious manner. That is our responsibility. I trust that when the time comes, the Council will again do its duty.

I would like to request that this statement be considered an official document of this meeting of the Council and posted on both the external server and the public website.

- - - 0 - - -