

07/05/2015

Statement on Syria from the Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

Madam Chair,

The United Kingdom supports the statement delivered by the distinguished Permanent Representative of Latvia, on behalf of the European Union. I would like to make the following additional remarks.

We have studied carefully the report that this Council commissioned from the Director General on the progress achieved and work still to do to eliminate Syria's chemical weapons programme. We are grateful for the Director General's assessment and, as always, his work and that of his staff in implementing the decisions of this Council towards the elimination of the Syrian programme. We salute all those States Parties which have provided in-kind or financial contributions towards the destruction of Syria's chemicals – the embodiment of a truly international cooperative endeavour. The United Kingdom has been pleased to play its part in this effort, and delighted to confirm that on 29 April, the last of the 11 drums of Hydrogen Fluoride were destroyed in commercial facilities in the United Kingdom, marking the completion of destruction of the United Kingdom's share of the declared chemical stockpile. We look forward to the OPCW's verification of the destruction operation in the coming weeks.

While progress has been made, and much more is now known about the Syrian chemical weapons programme than before, we must not lose sight of the overarching objective: to remove Syria's chemical weapons programme completely, and therefore the threat these weapons pose to the lives of Syria's people.

The fact that we have to meet today is testament to ongoing international concern that the work to remove the threat of chemical weapons is far from complete. Syrians continue to live in fear of chemicals being used as weapons. Over the past two months alone we have seen dozens of reports alleging use of chemical weapons, and witnesses have reported the horrific consequences of chlorine use. There is a high

level of consistency in these reports, and many of them appear credible. Even while the Executive Council gathered last week to reflect on the suffering of victims of chemical weapons around the world, reports emerged that a bomb filled with chlorine had been dropped on a hospital in Saraqib. Those using chemical weapons must be held accountable for their crimes and brought to justice.

We need to be clear: the use of any chemical, whether industrial or otherwise, as a weapon, is a breach of the Chemical Weapons Convention. United Nations Security Council Resolution 2209 was also clear that “ those individuals responsible for any chemical weapons use must be held accountable ”. An independent and thorough investigation into allegations of these latest, previous, and ongoing uses of chemical weapons is essential, and we support fully the continuation of the Fact Finding Mission’s work.

It is vital that we, and all States Parties, can have confidence that every element of Syria’s chemical weapon programme is being eliminated. For that to be possible the Syrian declaration needs to be complete, unambiguous, comprehensive and detailed. The exceptional circumstances in which the Syrian Arab Republic acceded to the Convention, and the decisions of this Council and the United Nations Security Council, mean that we must have full disclosure.

The United Kingdom is deeply concerned about ongoing discrepancies in the Syrian declaration. The sampling evidence we have seen so far from the Declaration Assessment Team highlights a very real risk that undeclared batches of chemical weapons may have been produced, and that filling activity may have taken place. The Declaration Assessment Team must make every effort to investigate further, and Syria must cooperate fully with all requests for access to sites, and interviews with those connected to the programme. It is only when we have confidence that Syria has declared its entire programme, that all its elements have been destroyed, and that the Syrian people are no longer subject to chemical weapons attacks, that we can consider this unique and challenging task fully achieved.

I ask that this statement be circulated as an official document of this meeting.