



Fiftieth Meeting
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STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR DR CHRISTOPH ISRANG PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF GERMANY TO THE OPCW AT THE FIFTIETH MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Mr Chairman, thank you for giving me the floor.

Germany fully aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union by Ambassador Pierre-Louis Lorenz, Permanent Representative of Luxembourg.

I take this opportunity to thank the Director-General and the Technical Secretariat for the three reports from the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission in Syria. Let me also thank the team for its excellent work in challenging and often dangerous circumstances. The team members' courage, professionalism, tenacity and impartiality deserve our appreciation.

The latest reports of the Fact-Finding Mission are extremely worrying. Again, the Fact-Finding Mission has come to the conclusion that chemical weapons were used in the Syrian Arab Republic. Again, the evidence suggests that the Syrian Government used chemical weapons against civilians in areas controlled by opposition forces. Again, the investigated incidents leave little room for speculation.

This Council has now received a total of six FFM reports, three this year and three in 2014. Four of them deal with the fact that chlorine was used as a weapon in the Syrian Arab Republic in 2014 and 2015. The most recent report on Idlib is the latest link in the chain of evidence already revealed by the three FFM reports from 2014. It concludes "that several incidents in the Syrian Arab Republic likely involved the use of one toxic chemical as a weapon", "probably containing the element chlorine".

The four reports clearly reveal common patterns regarding the use of chlorine as a weapon. They indicate that chlorine gas was dropped in barrel bombs from helicopters. The Idlib report gives three particularly clear indications:

- (a) the many eye witnesses and victims questioned by the FFM team who mentioned helicopters as well as the dull sound of the impact of barrel bombs;
- (b) the design and the remains of the barrel bombs, which contained no traces of rocket engines; and
- (c) craters caused by the impact of barrel bombs.



But let us not forget the human tragedy behind the technical facts. The Idlib report investigates 14 individual attacks which occurred in only three months. More than 270 people were injured and eight people killed.

There is one more report that is also highly disturbing: the report of the FFM on the alleged incident in Marea on 21 August 2015. The FFM “was able to confirm with the utmost confidence that at least two people were exposed to sulphur mustard” and “it is very likely that the effects of sulfur mustard resulted in the death of an infant”. This contributes very much to our concerns regarding the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic. The question of accountability will have to be determined by the Joint OPCW-UN Investigative Mechanism.

The third report describes the alleged incidents reported by the Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister and Head of National Authority. Due to the lack of hard evidence, the FFM was not able to confidently determine whether or not a chemical had been used as a weapon. However, several incidents are still being investigated in this context.

Let me stress the fact that all three reports are the result of extremely thorough, detailed work. This fact, together with the methodology chosen – especially with regard to the consistency of the evidence by cross-checking multiple sources, including the testimonies of various eyewitnesses – mean that the reports’ conclusions are extremely convincing.

Of course, most people in the Syrian Arab Republic are not victims of chemical weapons, but of conventional weapons. However, this is not the question at stake here. The Chemical Weapons Convention is one of the most successful disarmament treaties in the history of mankind. We must not lose sight of our goal to rid the world of this entire category of weapons. Consequently, their illegal use must be condemned in the strongest possible terms and those responsible identified and ultimately brought to justice.

Since the question of accountability was not included in the mandate of the FFM, a “Joint OPCW-UN Investigative Mechanism” has been established by United Nations Security Council resolution 2235 (2015) to identify those who are responsible for the use of chemicals, including chlorine or any other toxic chemical, as weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic. Germany strongly supports the establishment of the JIM and is going to contribute to it in 2015 and 2016. We are very much looking forward to receiving its reports.

Let me conclude, Mr Chairman, by calling on the members of this Council to adopt unanimously the draft decision jointly developed by Russia and the United States of America – it is this Council’s job to strongly condemn the continued use of toxic chemicals in the Syrian Arab Republic.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.

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