



MALTA EU 2017

**STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE EUROPEAN UNION
DELIVERED BY AMBASSADOR JOSEPH COLE
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF MALTA
TO THE OPCW
AT THE 54TH MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL
13 APRIL 2017**

Mrs Chairperson,
Mr Director-General,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union.

The candidate countries Albania and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, Norway, a member of the EFTA countries and the European Economic Area as well as Ukraine and Georgia align themselves with this statement. Andorra, Monaco and San Marino also associate themselves with this statement.

At the outset, I would like to express our appreciation to the Director-General for his informative presentation as well as to the OPCW staff for their commitment in the face of yet another appalling development in this string of recent tragic events in Syria.

The EU condemns in the strongest terms the attack that hit the town of Khan Sheikoun in Idlib province on 4 April 2017, which has had horrific consequences, causing the deaths and the injuries of scores of civilians including children and relief workers, with many victims displaying symptoms of gas poisoning and exposure to nerve agents. This appears to have been the most devastating use of chemical weapons since the use of sarin in Damascus in August 2013. The EU supports the OPCW's swift, independent and impartial investigation of the attack.

In this context, the EU expresses its appreciation that the OPCW's Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) has immediately begun its work to investigate the events in Khan Sheikhoun, in conformity with its mandate. The EU repeats its condemnation of all use of chemical weapons and its abhorrence at the actions of the Syrian Regime, which has been found by the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism to have used chemical weapons on at least three occasions in 2014 and 2015. The EU urges the JIM, in partnership with the FFM and, in conformity with its mandate, to work in haste to identify those responsible for the use of chemical weapons in Khan Sheikhoun, should this use be confirmed.



The EU reiterates that as a State Party to the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Syrian Arab Republic has explicitly obligated itself not to possess, develop or use chemical weapons. The horrific attack in Khan Sheikoun, demands Syria's full cooperation with the OPCW. Syria must answer the long list of outstanding questions regarding its declaration under the CWC.

The continuing use of chemical weapons in Syria also makes it all more important that Syria finally provides a comprehensive declaration of its chemical weapons programme, a clear, accurate and technically credible explanations of the gaps and omissions identified by the Technical Secretariat, to enable them to confirm that all stockpiles have been fully declared and destroyed.

The EU fully supports the valuable work of the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) of the OPCW, which must be continued and takes note of the last two reports to the Director General regarding the DAT and encourages that the OPCW makes further progress in investigating the gaps and inconsistencies described. Against the background of the 4 April attack and the JIM reports, there is an urgent need to understand what is the exact nature and dimension of the Syrian chemical programme.

The use of chemical weapons or toxic chemicals as weapons is an abhorrent act which must be wholly condemned. These heinous acts which are being carried out in Syria must stop and all perpetrators must be held accountable for the violation of international law. We have a shared responsibility to protect the Chemical Weapons Convention and the non-use norm that was so seriously eroded in Syria.

The EU will continue to support the OPCW's work to investigate all allegations of chemical weapons use in Syria. We request the Director-General to inform the Executive Council of the FFM's findings as soon as they become available.

Thank you Madam Chairperson