

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY



STATEMENT BY

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Madam Chair, Mr. Director-General, distinguished ambassadors and delegates,

This Council convenes today under the direst of circumstances. Barely one month ago, the Council met for its regularly scheduled March session. During that session, much of our deliberation was necessarily consumed by the numerous gaps, inconsistencies, and discrepancies in the false story that Syria continues to tell about its chemical weapons program. As has become an all-too-familiar routine, the Syrian delegation once again claimed that it was fulfilling all of its obligations, while at the same time casting blame and disparagement at others.

Last week, we watched in horror on April 4 as images unfolded of the worst chemical weapons attack by Syria since August of 2013. We witnessed innocent civilians in the city of Khan Sheikhoun – infants, children, women, men, parents, first responders – choking, gasping, dying. This attack was a direct affront to the Chemical Weapons Convention and, indeed, a direct affront to human decency, carried out by a State Party.

In direct response to this horrific atrocity, and seeking to deter and prevent the proliferation and use of deadly chemical weapons, the United States launched a military strike against the Shayrat Airfield in Syria – the Syrian military targets directly linked to the April 4 chemical weapons attack on Khan Sheikhoun. The U.S. response was proportional, targeted, and limited in scope. In taking this step, we sent an unequivocal message that the United States will not allow the use of chemical weapons against civilians to become a grotesque new “normal” leading to further acts of carnage in Syria and beyond.

Today, this Council convenes again in the wake of not only the devastating attack in Khan Sheikhoun, but also in the aftermath of two other reported chemical weapons attacks in the same ten-day period. The number of dead and injured from the alleged March 25 and March 30 attacks in Hama might be fewer than in Khan Sheikhoun, but these attacks are no less despicable, the suffering of the victims no less poignant, and the heroism of the doctors and first responders no less awe inspiring. Against this backdrop, the solemn responsibilities of this Council could not be more clear.

Madam Chair,

We have heard two versions of the horrific attack in Khan Sheikhoun. The first version, which is fully consistent with everything we know and all we have seen, is that the Syrian government, in flagrant violation of all of its obligations under the Convention, in total disregard for the lives of its citizens, and in utter contempt for humanity, once again used chemical weapons against its own

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people. The other version, contrary to all evidence, asks us to believe that Syrian airstrikes hit an opposition ammunition cache containing chemical munitions. Not surprisingly, the only parties peddling the second version are Syria itself, and its patron, the Russian Federation.

We have heard this all before. We have heard Syria assert that it has given up all of its chemical weapons and that the only participants in the Syrian conflict to use chemical weapons are “terrorists”. We have heard Syria, and Russia, straining to absolve the Asad regime again and again of any culpability for using chemical weapons in Syria. This, in spite of the findings of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) –United Nations (UN) Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM), which showed that Syria used chlorine as a chemical weapon in at least three cases. Moreover, these are the only attacks that the JIM could confirm with its limited time and resources—there are credible reports that Syria used chemical weapons many, many more times.

Madam Chair,

On April 4, the lifeless bodies of innocent victims, grotesquely contorted and twisted by the nerve agent sarin, tell the real story ... the true story. Syria provided a grossly incomplete declaration to the OPCW of its chemical weapons program; it continues to possess and use chemical weapons. Despite the repeated calls of the international community for an end to this barbarity, the Syrian government has shown time and again it is not willing to stop using chemical weapons; it is not willing to provide a full accounting of all of its chemical weapons and destroy them.

This outrage is abetted by Russia’s continuing efforts to bury the truth and protect the Syrian regime from any consequences for its heinous use of chemical weapons. That is deeply troubling on many levels, and not least because Russia itself pressed for, negotiated, and agreed to the Framework for the Elimination of Syrian Chemical Weapons on September 14, 2013, and the foundational decision this Council took two weeks later. In doing so, Russia assumed responsibility as guarantor for ensuring that its Syrian ally cease using chemical weapons and fully declare its chemical weapons program for destruction under OPCW oversight.

Compounding its irresponsible behavior in Syria’s continued use of chemical weapons, Moscow in the wake of the April 4 attack made false claims about the OPCW. On April 7, the Press Service of the President of Russia issued an official statement asserting “the fact of the destruction of all Syrian chemical weapons’ stockpiles has been recorded and verified by the OPCW, a specialized

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UN body.” In addition to the inaccurate categorization of the OPCW as a UN body, which it in fact is not, claims regarding Syria’s complete destruction of its chemical weapons are similarly untrue. As Russia is no doubt aware, nothing could be further from the truth as the Director-General on several occasions has made clear that “the Secretariat is not able to resolve all identified gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies in Syria’s declaration, and therefore cannot fully verify that Syria has submitted a declaration that can be considered accurate and complete in accordance with the Chemical Weapons Convention or Council decision EC-M-33/DEC.1, dated 27 September 2013.” Russia should immediately issue an official retraction of this blatant distortion.

Madam Chair,

I wish to thank the Director-General for his briefing regarding the ongoing, crucial work of the OPCW’s Fact Finding Mission as it pursues its investigation into the attack at Khan Sheikhoun and other such attacks. We urge the Fact Finding Mission to do its work thoroughly and expeditiously. Those responsible for these repeated chemical weapons attacks against Syrian citizens must be held accountable. We also ask States Parties to do whatever they can to facilitate the Fact Finding Mission’s access to the victims of these attacks and any other information that will help bring the perpetrators to justice. Together we must put an end to these monstrous acts.

Madam Chair,

The grave situation we face here today directly challenges all of us, individually and as a Council. History will record how we respond to Syria’s assault on the Convention - and on humanity itself. The United States has shown that it cannot and will not stand by and let these despicable acts go unanswered. This Council must do the same and so must the UN Security Council.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

I ask that this statement be designated an official document of the Executive Council meeting and posted on the external server and the public website.