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**RUSSIAN FEDERATION**

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR SHULGIN  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION TO THE OPCW  
AT THE FIFTY-FOURTH MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Madam Chairperson,

As a dedicated State Party to the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Russian Federation unconditionally condemns the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere. We vehemently reject the accusations implying that the Russian Federation somehow failed to prevent the tragic events in the Syrian Arab Republic, and further colluded in committing a crime involving the use of chemical weapons. This is a bald-faced lie.

Any criticism voiced here by certain delegations insinuating that the Russian Federation is growing more isolated on the international arena—its alienation, which, one might say, developed during the United Nations Security Council vote on 12 April this year—will not stand. It would appear as though someone wants to pass fantasy for reality. Yet the reality is that our position—which is open and honest—is clearly understood among all people of good will. We found the draft resolution that was put up for a vote yesterday at the United Nations Security Council unacceptable.

Truly, the “Western Three” presented an absolutely unfounded, unilateral, and accusatory draft resolution on Syria at the Security Council; the draft was merely a formality regarding the investigation of the incident in Idlib—it did not even contain any conditions regarding the need to visit the site. Given this situation, the Russian Federation was forced to block the passage of this document. There is no need to mislead anyone here regarding the reasons behind the Russian Federation’s veto at the Security Council.

I would also like to respond to the statement by Mr Ward, the Honourable Permanent Representative of the United States of America, that the Russian Federation allegedly falsely ascribes statements to the management of the OPCW that it did not make. This is—to put it lightly—a very strange assertion. Allow me to recall that the report of the Seventy-Sixth Session of the Executive Council plainly and clearly stated, and I quote: “noted, in particular, the completed elimination by 23 June 2014, i.e. in the first half of 2014 as envisaged in EC-M-33/DEC.1 (dated 27 September 2013), of all declared chemical weapons material and equipment from the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic, despite uniquely challenging conditions.” One wonders if this is in fact not a confirmation by our Organisation of the completion of chemical disarmament in Syria. So, Honourable Permanent Representative, please be more careful when reading official OPCW documents. As regards clarification of the initial Syrian declaration, everyone is well aware of the conditions in which it was



prepared: extremely tight deadlines, at the peak of an armed conflict. Clearly, Syria will have to clarify something. There is nothing out of the ordinary in that, as similar addenda have been made to initial declarations by other possessor States—including the United States.

It pains me to note that there are delegations attempting to turn today's meeting of the Executive Council into some kind of kangaroo court where the judge, jury, and executioner have already found their guilty party. Does that mean the investigation is already finished? Where exactly is the evidence pointing to the guilt of the incriminated Syrian side? We are told that American intelligence has irrefutable evidence, and therefore no investigation is really necessary. But we are already all too familiar with the value of American intelligence. I will come back to that shortly.

The Representative of Turkey reported on the statements by medical professionals from his country. They say [munitions were] opened, samples were collected, and it was established beyond the shadow of a doubt that people died from sarin. But what is this laboratory where the Turkish experts performed their analyses? Is it a laboratory certified by our Organisation? How were the samples collected? What was the sequence of steps, and was everything conducted in line with the methodology approved by the OPCW? I ask these questions because our military detected evidence of the use of chemical weapons in Syria and transferred the collected materials to The Hague, they were then literally "turned inside out", and explanations were demanded regarding compliance with the so-called chain-of-custody process. A heap of questions were asked at video conferences and during special meetings at the last session of the Executive Council. And what then? Three months passed, and the experts of the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) are still mulling everything over, unable to make a statement on the materials collected by the Russian military. Just think: three months—and no results. Then, in literally three days Turkish medical professionals, you see, submitted their own statements (what amazing speed!). So why should we believe that their word is Gospel? Why is the Technical Secretariat silent? It is regrettable that this essentially raw information is willingly being circulated and unscrupulously used by a number of delegations (as we can see based on the statement by the Honourable Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland).

We are disheartened that the statements made by the representatives of a number of Western countries have lauded the American missile strike on Syrian territory, as if this were a just and timely means of preventing the newest recidivists when it comes to the use of chemical weapons by Syrian government and military units. We believe this is something different altogether: this is a flagrant act of aggression on the part of the United States against the sovereign State of Syria; it is they who are crudely trampling upon all plausible and implausible standards of international law. The latter is of great significance. Present in this hall today are delegations of certain countries that, as we are well aware, are congratulating themselves on their dedication to international law. One might think that this becomes a bit awkward when they are forced—due to what is misinterpreted as NATO-EU solidarity—to associate themselves with Washington's unsavoury actions. As regards the allegedly restrained effect of the American missile strike in terms of the prevention of renewed use of chemical weapons on Syrian territory, we would like to advise our partners against getting too excited. First of all, the parties pleased with the actions of the United States are ISIL, Al-Nusra, and others like them. Their spirits are now lifted, because they understand that they will have more chances due to the weakening of the Syrian army, which is acknowledged as an effective tool in the fight against international terrorism on the ground in Syria.

This is yet another thing that our Western partners would rather not focus on. After all, it is a well-known fact that the terrorists in Syria and Iraq have stockpiles and capabilities for the production of not only toxic chemical agents, but fully-fledged chemical munitions as well. Wasn't it the American military that experienced "chemical" projectiles or mortar strikes itself at a base in Iraq? I believe that news was published several weeks ago.

We cannot help but be alarmed by the destructive stance taken at this meeting of the Executive Council by the American delegation. The statements made today by Mr Ward, the Honourable Permanent Representative of the United States, leads one to believe that the United States is attempting to manipulate our Organisation for its own selfish purposes, while their cronies from a number of other delegations in the Western group are willingly or unwillingly letting that happen. It would seem that there is a logical explanation for the United States' position: it would appear as though its main objective within the OPCW as it pertains to Syrian "chemicals" is to demonise the legitimate Syrian authorities in an effort to oust President Assad, who they find undesirable. Clearly, the United States has already accumulated vast experience in these types of affairs, causing countless problems for a number of countries. One needn't think long or hard to come up with an example—they are all there, plain as day: the former Yugoslavia, Libya, and Iraq. Today, they have set their sights on Syria.

But this is short-sighted, poorly planned politics that will ultimately return like a boomerang to strike the United States itself and those who attempt to blindly follow this cowboy approach to resolving international problems. As they say: "He who sows the wind shall reap the tempest." Could it be that the Americans are proposing that the Libyans, for whom they helped oust Gaddafi, will then brutally kill their own ambassador and several colleagues of the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi? And how about our French friends, who today preached a sermon on morality aimed at us? One may recall that they were proud—even flaunted the fact—that they sent anti-Gaddafi weapons in violation of the United Nations Security Council's resolution on that matter. The then-President of France, Mr Sarkozy, having arrived in Libya soon after the carnage with Gaddafi, dramatically contemplated the posters hung around the Libyan capital, taking to heart the message therein: "Thank you, France, for our freedom!" (It's rather reminiscent of Soviet times, when the Pioneers and Little Octobrists would say: "Thank you, Comrade Stalin, for our happy childhood!") Yet the happiness of our French friends, as it turned out, turned to despair when it came time to "wash away their bloody tears." Soldiers in Mali used those very same weapons shipped to the Libyan insurgents against the French themselves. As it turned out, these weapons made their way out of Libya and into, not only Mali, but also a number of other terrorist "hot spots" in the region.

The OPCW should not be held captive by contemptable political games. It should have been enough of a regrettable experience for the international community when former U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell shocked the United Nations with the test tube filled with some kind of white powder rustled up by American intelligence and presented by the Secretary-General as a strain of anthrax from Saddam Hussein's arsenal. But in fact, it was dental powder inside that test tube. Because of this, the sham essentially began with the American adventure in Iraq, which ended with the destruction of the Iraqi State and the emergence of groups like ISIS, a branch of which comprised former officers of the Iraqi armed forces.

I would also recommend that the Honourable Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom endeavours to rein in his hawkish zeal. He would be better served recalling the recent admission by former Prime Minister Blair that the investigative commission—established by the British themselves—was caught in a deliberate lie, provoking England’s participation in the incursion into Iraq by the American-led coalition. Mr Blair, it would seem, even apologised to his friends and family for those Tommies who died in Iraq. Several hundreds of very young men. But is he, Mr Blair, and those hawks currently in power on the banks of the Thames, planning to make any apology to the Iraqi people, the victims of which—as the result of a planned Anglo-Saxon incursion based on lies—number not in the hundreds, but in the tens of thousands?

Frankly speaking, we were aiming to have a technical discussion today, as is the norm at the OPCW— technical within the scope of the Organisation. But thanks to the efforts of our Western colleagues, emotions today are “running high”. Let us take a step back from the rhetoric for a moment and attempt to look at this in a more or less rational manner. It is clear that Damascus has not had any need to use chemical weapons in Idlib, even if they hypothetically had any. On the other hand, you have the radical opposition where there would obviously be a temptation to do so. What it looks like is that someone very much wanted to change the political process in Geneva and disrupt the negotiations in Astana, where the Russian Federation, Turkey, and the Islamic Republic of Iran, acting in their roles as intermediaries, are working in the interests of ensuring compliance with the terms of a ceasefire and to create the prerequisites for a solid resolution of the Syrian crisis in general. Essentially, what is happening today is suspiciously reminiscent of the events of autumn 2013. As we all know, the then-President of the United States, Barack Obama, announced the establishment of a “red line”—marking the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian military—for the start of American military interference. But one of America’s allies could not wait to “jump into the ring”. They had already warmed up the motors of their bomber aircrafts and raised the anchors of their battleships. Just one thing was missing: crossing the notorious “red line”—which was inevitable, according to Obama’s promises—was to be followed by a U.S. strike. And soon—really soon, incidentally—a tragedy took place in East Ghouta, a suburb of Damascus. Some American allies commented that “big brother” would get involved, and speculated as to where they might strike, even if it was a very modest strike, but all the same a strike against Syrian tyranny; time to put those domestic policy shades on. But it was a “flop”. The Russian Federation and the United States agreed on the chemical disarmament of Syria—which was conducted successfully and certified as such by our Organisation.

So, what could have happened in Khan Shaykhun? One could surmise that the Syrian armed forces actually bombed an underground chemical weapons production facility. Another version is that this was a provocation by the terrorists themselves. The soul-shattering videos of dying children does not, however, erase the need to consider why the notorious “White Helmet” volunteers are providing first aid to the victims without any individual protective gear. After all, if sarin—a deadly volatile chemical agent—had really been used as the representative of Turkey told us today, then a gauze mask alone would not have been sufficient by any means. It is very unfortunate that despite our request, the Secretariat has not provided us with a full-fledged technical briefing today. Therefore, we must rely on the opinion of one Swedish expert who was puzzled by the images spread all over the world. I refer to the volunteers coming into direct contact with the victims, holding children in agony to their chests, running somewhere with them. Is anyone aware of casualties among the volunteers? If this is not the case and all of them are still alive and well, continuing their acts

of mercy like Good Samaritans, then the whole scene could have been staged. Staging is indeed something the “White Helmets” are skilled at. I personally saw a YouTube video showing a Syrian, who by all accounts appeared unconscious and bleeding somewhere in Aleppo. Two volunteers wearing white helmets were making a fuss around him, either providing first aid or doing something else. Anyway, they were making some movements with their hands. Then this man, who had allegedly been seriously wounded, easily sat up and talked to the volunteers in an annoyed voice: “Stop messing around, let’s start shooting the video”. I am certainly not the only one to have seen this video. So let’s at least take this possibility into account.

Now I would like to comment on the reproach from the Permanent Representative of Canada, who argued that we had undervalued the significance of the work carried out by the FFM in Syria. I suggest that we look into this matter calmly. We know that our Syrian colleagues have serious concerns about the work of the FFM in Syria. According to the mandate of this mission, its membership must be balanced and negotiated with the Syrian Government. For a while, this requirement had been respected, but later the FFM was divided into two teams. One team, led by Mr Wallis from the United Kingdom, works in liaison with the Syrian Government, while the other team led by Mr Phillips, who is a fellow national of Mr Wallis, deals with the claims made by the Syrian armed opposition. Now, it is the latter team that carries out its work in an absolutely non-transparent manner. Its membership is kept in secret, and we do not know where it goes or how it works. They say it follows the same methodology as the team of Mr Wallis, but in fact most of the time it works remotely, relying on the Internet and information spread by non-governmental organisations that belong to the Syrian opposition—without visiting Syria at all. At least we are unaware of any such visits. This is clearly a deviation from the mandate of the FFM in Syria that was originally agreed upon. So let’s be frank when we answer this question: can this mission, particularly the team led by Mr Phillips, provide credible investigative results? I would like to clarify that we are not in favour of terminating the FFM in Syria as such. Let it continue its work, for God’s sake. However, let’s bring its membership in line with the principle of balanced geographical representation enshrined in the United Nations Charter. Is that an extraordinary request? Are we being capricious? Of course not. This is normal United Nations practice, which should be introduced here at the OPCW as well. Let us also invite recognised international experts from various countries, specifically from permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, to work in the FFM in Syria as suggested in the letter from First Deputy Foreign Minister of Syria Mr Mekdad to the Director-General of the OPCW.

Why do we think this is important? Just look at what is happening now. Nine days have already passed since the alleged use of chemical weapons in Idlib. The Syrian authorities notified the Organisation appropriately. And how is it responding? What is the FFM doing? Hints have been dropped suggesting that it is engaged in the collection of initial information and awaiting the approval of the relevant United Nations department to visit Khan Shaykhun. However, even when considering security issues, we have to admit that at the moment, the FFM is either inactive or is pretending to be active at best.

In view of the above, we decided to submit a draft decision together with our Iranian colleagues to the Executive Council requesting the Secretariat to establish an international expert mission that could bring FFM personnel together with national experts from a number of countries selected in accordance with the United Nations principle of balanced geographical representation. For example, it could include experts from the Russian Federation, China, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, the Islamic Republic of

Iran, Sweden, Spain, Switzerland, and other States. In terms of specific individuals, I could mention people such as Mr Mogl from Switzerland, Mr Trapp from Germany, Mr Sellström from Sweden, and Cheng Tang from China—all of whom are well known at the OPCW and enjoy well deserved recognition as experts. I would like to emphasise that the purpose of this mission, in our view, would be to investigate how chemical weapons had been delivered to Khan Shaykhun and how they were used, if that use did in fact take place. At the same time, this team should look into the allegations made by the United States (and their allies) that the Syrian al-Shayrat Airbase was used to store chemical weapons and organise operational flights of aircraft to deliver bombs filled with toxic agent. After all, if chemical weapons were stored there, then it certainly constituted a breach of the Convention. Shouldn't the OPCW investigate this fact? Shouldn't we urgently send inspectors there, so that they can ascertain whether chemical weapons were present there or not? Furthermore, they say sarin is a volatile agent and we will not be able to find any traces of it after 10 days. I am not a chemist, of course. However, recalling that another OPCW mission for the verification of the Syrian initial declaration was able to find evidence of chemical activity carried out at the facilities many years before by taking swipes from the ventilation shafts, taking swabs from the equipment, and collecting soil samples, I would venture to suggest that experts from the Secretariat, especially in collaboration with recognised international experts, will be able to establish the truth.

In order to fulfil its mission to successfully conduct an investigation, an international group of experts—we would like to stress this in particular—must go directly to the location of the incident and work in strict compliance with the methodology approved by the OPCW, focusing on the collection of material evidence, rather than relying on speculations from the Internet and the accounts of alleged witnesses interviewed in a country neighbouring Syria.

Now regarding the security issues related to the mission's work. Frankly speaking, we see no obstacles in the way of launching an investigation as soon as possible, considering the readiness of the Syrian Government to ensure free and secure access of OPCW experts to the al-Shayrat airbase. In turn, the countries that have influence with the armed Syrian opposition should assist in organising a safe trip to Khan-Shaykhun as soon as possible. As far as we understand, the statement by the General Coordinator of the Syrian opposition High Negotiations Committee, Mr Hijab, concerning its readiness to provide support in conducting an international investigation—which presumably also guarantees a secure visit to the site of the incident—could prove instrumental in these efforts.

Following the events in Idlib and the serious violation of international law by the United States—an aggression against the sovereignty of Syria—any further delay is unacceptable. In this regard, we would hope that the draft decision submitted to the Executive Council will be adopted and that the mission of international experts proposed by our delegation and that of the Islamic Republic of Iran will begin working in Syria no later than 22 April this year.

We request the Secretariat, in line with established procedures, to distribute the text of the draft decision submitted jointly by the Russian Federation and the Islamic Republic of Iran. We should be grateful to States Parties for their comments on this draft. We are prepared to consider all constructive feedback, and to be flexible and work tirelessly to clarify the circumstances of the incident in Idlib. We cannot agree with the foot-dragging when it comes to launching a full-fledged investigation. We have already heard the proposal of the distinguished Permanent Representative of the United States, Mr Ward: to take a break for three weeks, then see what's next, and perhaps convene again if the FFM report is ready by

then—but who knows. This proposal from the distinguished Permanent Representative of the United States gives rise to disheartening suggestions: do our partners—first and foremost the United States, but also all those who spoke today in unison with them, ardently and passionately condemning Syria as well as the Russian Federation—really want to conduct a truly full-fledged investigation at all? It is difficult to shrug off the impression that in fact they do not.

In this regard, I cannot help but share with our colleagues here today one unsettling observation: for the last three years, the Russian Federation has on several occasions raised the issue in New York that the United Nations Security Council should somehow respond to the growing number of incidents of chemical terrorism in Syria and Iraq (by adopting an appropriate resolution or at least issuing a statement by the Security Council President). All of these incidents are in public view. There is a serious threat that terrorists will use chemical agents not only in that region, but in other parts of the world as well—including Europe. But to our great regret, at every turn our American partners and their close associates thwart any attempt at adopting such a resolution. It is difficult to say exactly how much such cases have taken place already, but clearly more than eight, when the Russian Federation had no other option but to exercise its right of veto against proposals to adopt unjust Security Council resolutions on the situation in Syria.

Therefore, I would like delegations to understand the seriousness of the present situation. We must act quickly. At stake is the credibility of the OPCW, a laureate of the Nobel Peace Prize. Now is exactly the time when our Organisation must make its voice heard and must rise to the occasion.

I would ask that this statement be distributed as an official document of the Fifty-Fourth Meeting of the Executive Council.

I apologise that I have gone beyond the allotted time. But we have been meeting here for roughly seven hours. Many delegations made their statements and some of them let loose a plethora of accusations against Syria, as well as against our country. Therefore in response, I had to introduce multiple additions to my relatively short prepared statement when other speakers made their statements. Again, my apologies.

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.

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