



STATEMENT BY H.E. KENNETH D. WARD

**Permanent Representative of the
United States of America
to the OPCW**

**at the Fifty-Sixth Meeting of the Executive Council
EC-M-56**

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Mr. Chairman, Mr. Director-General, distinguished ambassadors and delegates,

There can be no doubt that a State Party to the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Syrian Arab Republic, was responsible for the sarin nerve agent attack of April 4, 2017, in Khan Shaykhun.

There can be no doubt that the Syrian government continues to possess chemical weapons and, hence, that it made a false declaration regarding its chemical weapons program.

There can be no doubt that since 2013, Syria has engaged in a grotesque and calculated campaign of chemical weapons use in defiance of the Convention, this Council, and UN Security Council resolutions.

There can be no doubt that these chemical weapons attacks by the Syrian government must be met with severe condemnation and that the Syrian government must be held accountable here in this Council and at the UN Security Council.

There can be no doubt that, with the recent Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) report of another sarin attack on March 30, 2017, the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) must be renewed and its investigations continued.

There can be no doubt that if we do not act, the international norm against the use of chemical weapons will erode further.

Mr. Chairman,

Last year, this Council was compelled to take decisive action in response to the Joint Investigative Mechanism's finding that, in 2014-2015, the Syrian Arab Republic was responsible for the confirmed use of chlorine as a chemical weapon against opposition-controlled areas in Syria. The JIM also confirmed that the so-called "Islamic State" was responsible for the use of chemical weapons in 2015. In a decision adopted on November 11, 2016, the Council condemned the use of chemical weapons in Syria, called for an end to all chemical weapons use, demanded that the Syrian government comply fully with its obligations under the Convention, and imposed new verification measures on Syrian government facilities.

Rather than heed that call, the Assad regime intensified its campaign of chemical weapons attacks, escalating from chlorine barrel bombs to even more deadly sarin aerial bombs. The seventh OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism report, issued on October 26, concluded with confidence that the Syrian Arab Republic was responsible for the release of sarin at Khan Shaykhun, Syria, on April 4, 2017, killing and injuring a large number of people.

We have now learned of yet another sarin attack just days before the Khan Shaykhun attack. On November 2, the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission issued a report concluding

that “sarin was more than likely used as a chemical weapon on 30 March 2017” in the south of al-Lataminah. This latest report raises very serious concerns that the Syrian government has engaged in a concerted campaign of sarin use against opposition-controlled areas. It is critical, therefore, that the Joint Investigative Mechanism identify those responsible for this attack.

We also note that the report identified the so-called “Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant” (ISIL) as responsible for the use of sulfur mustard at Umm Hawsh, Syria, on September 15 and 16, 2016.

Mr. Chairman,

This Council once again is compelled to take decisive action with respect to the Syrian Arab Republic, and such action must be commensurate with the severity of the April 4 sarin attack in Khan Shaykhun. To that end, the United States intends to work closely with delegations to build broad support for a decision text containing the following elements:

- The decision must acknowledge the JIM report’s findings that identify Syria as responsible for the use of sarin in Khan Shaykhun on April 4, 2017, and, by direct implication, that Syria failed to declare its full chemical weapons program;
- The decision must address the Council’s responsibilities, under paragraph 35 of Article VIII of the Convention, to consider “concerns regarding compliance, and cases of non-compliance”;
- The decision must demand that Syria immediately cease all use of chemical weapons, and the Council must take additional measures to address the situation and to ensure that Syria declares the chemical weapons it continues to illicitly possess;
- The Council must, as it did in its November 11, 2016, decision, condemn the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic – use that violates the Convention, UN Security Council resolution 2118 and decisions of this Council, as well as well-established international standards and norms against such use;
- And, finally, the decision must require the Director-General to report to the Executive Council and the UN Secretary-General regarding Syria’s adherence to additional measures to redress the situation.

The elements I have just outlined are entirely appropriate and necessary, and are fully aligned with the Convention and its preamble imperative to “exclude completely the possibility of the use of chemical weapons, through the implementation of the provisions of the Convention.” Given the appalling circumstances and horrific loss of life, such a decision should not be controversial; indeed, it should be readily adopted by consensus.

Mr. Chairman,

The grim reality we face on this Council, however, is that Russia continues to deny the truth and, instead, collaborates with the Assad regime in a deplorable attempt to discredit the Fact-Finding Mission and the Joint Investigative Mechanism and their important work.

Regrettably, Russia has abetted Syria's use of chemical weapons and disregarded the international responsibilities Syria undertook. It was Russia that in September 2013 pressed for, negotiated, and agreed to, the bilateral Framework for the Elimination of Syrian Chemical Weapons, and fully supported the decision of this Council and UN Security Council Resolution 2118, which quickly followed. Undeniably, Russia had assumed responsibility for ensuring that its Syrian ally stop using chemical weapons and fully declare and destroy its chemical weapons program with OPCW oversight. Russia has not only ignored this responsibility, it has directly emboldened the Assad regime by vetoing in February a Security Council resolution designed to hold the Syrian government responsible for its chemical weapons use and deter further use. In so doing, Russia has signaled to Syria that it may continue its reign of chemical terror with impunity, secure in the knowledge that Russia will protect it.

Mr. Chairman,

In all, Russia has used its veto power nine times to block UN Security Council action on Syria. Most recently, on October 24, Russia vetoed a Security Council resolution to renew the Joint Investigative Mechanism, which expires on November 16. Russia's opposition to JIM renewal is misplaced. Russia must fulfill the commitment it made in the 2013 Framework Agreement, and Moscow should communicate to Syria that Russia will not tolerate any further Syrian possession or use of chemical weapons.

Russia should support the renewal of the Joint Investigative Mechanism to signal to its Syrian client and to the world that Moscow is committed to a Syria free of chemical weapons, and that Moscow will take the steps needed to fulfill this goal.

Mr. Chairman,

The use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere, is a threat to all of us, and we should respond with collective resolve. Let me be clear – inaction by this Council is unacceptable, as it would severely damage the credibility and effectiveness of this Organization and the Chemical Weapons Convention, and undermine the broader framework of arms control and non-proliferation.

Mr. Chairman,

The world owes an enormous debt of thanks to the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission, the OPCW Declaration Assessment Team, and the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism. The FFM, the DAT, and the JIM have dragged the heinous crimes of the

Syrian government out of the shadows and into the stark international spotlight. Someday, in that very spotlight, those in the Syrian government responsible for chemical weapons attacks will be held accountable. The United States commends the members of the FFM, the DAT, and the JIM for their dedication, professionalism, and historic efforts.

Mr. Chairman,

The eyes of the world are upon this Council. As the protectors of the Chemical Weapons Convention, we cannot fail to hold one of our States Parties accountable for violating the most fundamental prohibitions of that Convention against the possession and use of chemical weapons. The United States has demonstrated that we will not stand by and let these despicable acts go unanswered. We will not turn our backs on the Convention and allow chemical weapons atrocities to negate twenty years of global progress and replace it with a grotesque new normal.

We are fighting now for the future of our Convention and its promise of a world free of chemical weapons. None of us can abstain from meeting this challenge and sit idly on the sidelines. Membership on this Council carries with it a solemn responsibility to uphold the Convention and to defend the integrity of the OPCW. The room in which we meet today is surrounded by a sea of politics and discord. In this room, however, we are meant to be united by a shared conviction, a shared humanity. Twenty years ago we all pledged to renounce the possession and use of chemical weapons and, as important, not to tolerate those who use such horrific weapons – be they governments or non-State actors. No one on this Council can abstain from that pledge enshrined in the Chemical Weapons Convention. Together we must put an end to these monstrous acts.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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