



OPCW

Executive Council

Fifty-Sixth Meeting
9, 17, 23, and 24 November 2017

EC-M-56/NAT.8
9 November 2017
ENGLISH and FRENCH only

SWITZERLAND

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR URS BREITER
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF SWITZERLAND TO THE OPCW
AT THE FIFTY-SIXTH MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairperson,

Thank you for convening this special meeting of the Executive Council to discuss the seventh report of the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM).

Following an in-depth investigation conducted with professionalism and impartiality, the JIM reached two conclusions. The first is that the Syrian Arab Republic—a Member State of the Organisation—is responsible for the sarin gas attack that took place on 4 April 2017 in Khan Shaykhun. While we could say that this was an unprecedented situation when the conclusions of the third report of the JIM came out, the same cannot be said today. The members of the Council are once again faced with a situation in which evidence has been presented to them that one of the Member States of the Organisation has violated the Chemical Weapons Convention. Because the Council cannot ignore such serious violations of the Convention and international humanitarian law, it has a duty to adopt a decision strongly condemning such violations and to take action through concrete measures. The use of sarin gas, by anyone and under any circumstances, cannot be ignored. Ignoring it would amount to tolerating it.

The second conclusion reached by the JIM was that the self-proclaimed ‘Islamic State’ used sulfur mustard in Um-Housh on 15 and 16 September 2016. This is the second time that the JIM has reached such a conclusion. The repeated use of chemical weapons by non-State actors is extremely alarming.

Switzerland condemns in the strongest terms the use of chemical weapons by any actor in the Syrian Arab Republic. International law requires all States to bring the perpetrators of such acts to justice. We reiterate our call to the United Nations Security Council to refer the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic to the International Criminal Court. Impunity in the face of these crimes is unacceptable and only increases the likelihood that such crimes will be committed again, as the latest conclusions of the JIM confirm.



In this context, we call for close cooperation between the OPCW and the impartial and independent international mechanism, which was established by the United Nations General Assembly to facilitate the investigations of the most serious violations of international law committed in the Syrian Arab Republic.

According to the JIM, the sarin identified in the samples taken in Khan Shaykhun had most likely been made with the precursor DF from the original stock from the Syrian Arab Republic. The veracity and completeness of the Syrian initial declaration therefore is once again called into question, confirming that this declaration is at the heart of the problem and cannot be dealt with separately. So long as the discrepancies and irregularities have not been resolved, the members of the Organisation will have legitimate reason to doubt that the Syrian chemical weapons programme has been eliminated.

We thank all of the members of the JIM for the excellent work they have done in often difficult circumstances. Concerning the renewal of the JIM's mandate, it is essential that the United Nations Security Council come to an agreement as quickly as possible. Further investigations are necessary, as demonstrated most notably by the latest report of the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission regarding the incident in Ltamenah on 30 March 2017.

Finally, Switzerland would emphasise once again that the continued and repeated use of chemical weapons jeopardises the longstanding norm and risks undermining the chemical weapons non-proliferation regime. The members of the Council must do everything in their power to put an end to this spiral.

Thank you.

- - - 0 - - -