

THE NETHERLANDS

STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR PAUL VAN DEN IJSSEL PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE TO THE ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

AT THE FIFTY-EIGHT SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL 16 APRIL 2018

Mr. Chairperson,

While associating itself fully with the statement made by Bulgaria on behalf of the EU, The Netherlands would like to make the following remarks.

First of all I would like to thank the DG for his introduction and for the initiative to call this meeting. We think it is important that events such as the one we are discussing today and that touch at the heart of the norms and values we are expected to defend here, are discussed in the political organs of the OPCW.

Mr. Chairperson,

Again we meet in the wake of a horrific chemical attack that has, according to a number of sources, caused the deaths of dozens of civilians, among them children. Once again, we witness a serious violation of international law that may constitute a war crime or a crime against humanity. And once again, The Netherlands condemns in the strongest terms the use of chemical weapons by any State or Non State actor and will continue to do so, and will never accept it.

Mr. Chairperson,

Despite all these violations of international law we have seen over the last years, the international community must fully uphold the standard that the use of chemical weapons is never permissible. We must continue to press for accountability for the use of Chemical Weapons in Syria. For my country this is not optional.

And yet even after that horrific attack the Security Council was not able to unite last week. A proposal for a truly independent and impartial mechanism that would be able to replace the JIM with a mandate to investigate who is responsible for the use of CW was blocked by a veto in UNSC. Again, I have to say, because it was not the first time action in the UN Security Council was blocked. Russia has now used its Veto 6 times in instances involving chemical weapons in Syria, including its repeated vetoes to prevent an extension of the mandate of the Joint Investigative Mechanism. By doing so it has taken a very heavy responsibility upon its shoulders.

The Dutch government believes it is likely that the Syrian regime is responsible for the attack. The Syrian regime has a proven history of such attacks – in 2014, 2015 and 2017, when it used chemicals as a weapon against its own people, as concluded by the Joint Investigative Mechanism.

In addition, it should be noted with the utmost concern that the regime has not yet been transparent about its chemical weapons programme, four years after acceding to the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Mr. Chairperson,

Against the background of past horrors and the unabated risk of recurrence, the response by France, the United Kingdom and the United States is understandable. The response was measured in targeting a limited number of military facilities that were used by the Syrian regime to sustain its illegal chemical weapons arsenal. The action taken by these three countries made clear that the use of chemical weapons is unacceptable.

Mr. Chairperson,

We commend the DG for immediately deploying the FFM to investigate the Douma events. It is important that the FFM team has unhindered access to persons and sites they deem relevant for their investigation. We hope that the FFM will be able to provide us as soon as possible with a detailed report.

However, we all know that establishing the facts is only part of the chain. If we really want to stop this seemingly endless occurrence of crimes, we have to find out who are responsible and hold them accountable.

Therefore, we need a successor to the Joint Investigative Mechanism. The Netherlands welcomes every option, be it within the UN-framework, or within the framework of other relevant international organizations, as long as it results in an impartial and truly independent mechanism that can establish who is responsible, so that subsequently the perpetrators can be held to account.

Any new mechanism should build upon the important work of the JIM and the ongoing OPCW Fact Finding Mission.

Mr. Chairperson,

Impunity for these horrible crimes - we have been discussing here in the last years - is not acceptable to the Netherlands nor should it be for any other country represented here.

Thank you for your attention.