

Statement by Austria

at the 58th meeting of the Executive Council, 16 April 2018

Mr. Gerhard Eisl, Minister Plenipotentiary

Permanent Mission of Austria to the OPCW

Mr. Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Colleagues,

Austria, aligned with the EU Statement, would like to make the following remarks speaking in national capacity:

We are grateful to Director-General H.E. Ambassador Ahmed Üzümcü for the prompt reaction to the reports of the latest chemical attack, and in particular the prompt deployment of the Fact Finding Mission to Douma.

The use of chemical weapons, including the use of any toxic chemicals as weapons, by anyone under any circumstances is a violation of international law that requires a firm reaction by States Parties. We have repeatedly said that the use of such weapons - irrespective by whom and where - is unacceptable.

Austria is extremely concerned about the use of chemical weapons in Syria. We are horrified by the pictures from Douma and other places, and express our deepest condolences to the victims' families and friends.

As the Nobel Prize Committee declared in 2013 when awarding the Nobel Peace Prize to the OPCW:

"The conventions and the work of the OPCW have defined the use of chemical weapons as a taboo under international law. (Recent) events in Syria, where

chemical weapons have again been put to use, have underlined the need to enhance the efforts to do away with such weapons.”

Austria expresses, once again, its full and entire support to the OPCW and the FFM as well as efforts by the whole international community against the use of chemical weapons in Syria. Furthermore, we call on states with influence on the Syrian government - like Russia and Iran - to also use their influence to achieve this goal.

Any further escalation of tension in Syria must be avoided. We regret that the UN Security Council has not been able to agree on measures. The civilian population in Syria has suffered through so many years of violence - we must actively seek ways to end hostilities there. All parties must engage fully in the efforts of UN Envoy Staffan de Mistura. Austria is ready to contribute its part in order to get peace negotiations under way, e.g. by offering Vienna as a venue.

We reiterate our appeal that all those who commit war crimes and crimes against humanity, such as the use of chemical weapons, must be held accountable. Therefore, we regret that the activities of the JIM could not be continued and call on the Security Council Members to finally agree on re-establishing such a critical mechanism. State responsibility and accountability of individuals are pillars of an international order based on rule of law; we recall in this respect our repeated appeals to the UNSC to refer the situation in Syria to the ICC. Austria remains firmly committed to such an international order and effective multilateralism.

Mr. Chairperson,

The suffering of the Syrian people must come to an end. Never again we should see pictures of children desperately trying to breath after the use of chemical weapons. If the obstruction of the multilateral system to deal effectively with the violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention continues, we all have lost.

I would kindly ask that this statement be issued as an official document and placed on the OPCW public website.