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OPCW stands ready to support Syria in meeting its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention, Director-General Arias says

8 February 2025

THE HAGUE, Netherlands—8 February 2025 — At the invitation of the Syrian caretaker Foreign Minister, the Director-General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), Ambassador Fernando Arias, accompanied by a high-level delegation from the OPCW, visited Damascus to meet with Syria’s interim President Ahmad al-Sharaa and caretaker Foreign Minister Asaad Hassan al-Shaibani.

The meetings were long, productive and very open, with an in-depth exchange of information, which will serve as a basis to reach tangible results and break the stalemate that has lasted for over eleven years.

The visit marked a first step towards re-establishing a direct working relationship between the OPCW Technical Secretariat and Syria, following eleven years of stagnation and lack of progress with the former authorities. In their meeting, both sides discussed Syria’s obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), the role and mandate of the OPCW, and the type of support the Technical Secretariat can provide to the Syrian caretaker authorities in eliminating the remnants of Syria’s chemical weapons programme.

“This visit marks a reset. After eleven years of obstruction by the previous authorities, the Syrian caretaker authorities have a chance to turn the page and meet Syria’s obligations under the Convention,” said Director-General Arias.

“My presence in Damascus reflects the OPCW’s commitment to rebuilding a relationship based on mutual trust and transparency,” he underlined. “For over a decade, Syria’s chemical weapons dossier was at a deadlock. Today, we must seize this opportunity together and break that impasse for the good of the Syrian people and the international community.”

Since 2013, Syria’s declaration of its chemical weapons programme has been incomplete, with significant quantities unaccounted for and a lack of cooperation by the former Syrian authorities. This led to the suspension of some of Syria’s rights in the OPCW Policy-Making Organs since April 2021. Director-General Arias underlined that the OPCW looks forward to working with Syria’s transitional government in addressing these open questions and implementing its responsibilities to regain its rights at the Organisation. For that purpose, he presented to the interim President and the caretaker Foreign Minister, the Secretariat’s 9-point Action Plan for Syria .

The Director-General further emphasised that the OPCW stands ready to support Syria in meeting its obligations under the Convention. In doing so, the caretaker authorities will safeguard the Syrian people, help hold to account any identified perpetrators of chemical weapons use, and bolster the country’s reputation as a reliable and trusted member of the international community.

“This visit lays the ground for working together towards closing the Syrian chemical weapons file for good and fostering long-term compliance, regional stability, and contributing to peace and international security” said Director-General Arias.

Background

The Syrian Arab Republic became a State Party to the CWC — and a Member State of the OPCW — in October 2013. As a result of a joint OPCW-UN mission (October 2013 – September 2014) in cooperation with the former Syrian authorities, all of the chemical weapons declared by Syria were removed and verifiably destroyed. Questions about the accuracy and completeness of Syria’s initial declaration have remained.

The OPCW’s 9-Point Action Plan for Syria is based on the Technical Secretariat’s extensive experience and lays out the next steps in this process: drawing an inventory of sites, equipment, munitions, chemicals, documents, people, and facilities; declaring all elements of the Syrian chemical weapons programme, and have it verifiably eliminated; establish, through reinforced cooperation, long-term compliance with the CWC.

To ensure Syria’s compliance with its obligations under the Convention, there are currently three different OPCW missions with an active mandate to work on chemical weapons related issues: the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) , the OPCW Fact-Finding mission (FFM) , and the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) .

As the implementing body for the Chemical Weapons Convention, the OPCW, with its 193 Member States, oversees the global endeavour to permanently eliminate chemical weapons. Since the Convention’s entry into force in 1997, it is the most successful disarmament treaty eliminating an entire class of weapons of mass destruction.

In 2023, the OPCW verified that all chemical weapons stockpiles declared by the 193 States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention since 1997 — totalling 72,304 metric tonnes of chemical agents — have been irreversibly destroyed under the OPCW's strict verification regime.

For its extensive efforts in eliminating chemical weapons, the OPCW received the 2013 Nobel Peace Prize.

More Information

Courtesy translation in Arabic

Syria and the OPCW

Press Release: OPCW urges Syria to fulfil Chemical Weapons Convention obligations, dated 12 December 2024

Statement by the Director-General to the Sixty-Sixth Meeting of the Executive Council

Director-General

Fact-Finding Mission (FFM)

Fernando Árias

Syria

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