

PRESS RELEASE

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Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the EU on the use of chemical weapons in Syria

Today the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) presented its seventh report which concludes that the Syrian Arab Republic was responsible for the release of sarin at Khan Sheikhoun, Syria, on 4 April 2017. The JIM also determined that Da'esh was responsible for the use of sulphur mustard at Um-Housh on September 15 and 16, 2016.

The EU expresses its strongest condemnation of these unspeakable acts. The Syrian regime's appalling use of sarin nerve agent against the people of Khan Sheikhoun resulted in hundreds of casualties. The use of chemical weapons by anyone, be it a State or non-State actors, anywhere and under any circumstances is contrary to international law and must be rigorously condemned.

The EU fully supports the work of the UN-OPCW Joint Investigative Mechanism. Their professionalism and independence is held in the highest regard and trust. The JIM needs to continue its valuable work. We therefore urge the United Nations Security Council to maintain the JIM's investigative capacity.

This is now the fourth chemical attack by the Syrian Armed Forces and the second by Da'esh confirmed by the JIM. Attacks of this kind only reinforce the urgent need for a genuine political transition in Syria and the EU's will to support UN efforts to broker a political solution to the Syrian conflict through the intra-Syrian talks in Geneva.

Those responsible for such acts must be held accountable. Any entities and individuals guilty of violations of international law, including the use of chemical weapons have to be sanctioned accordingly.

The EU has repeatedly taken action against any confirmed use of chemical weapons by the Syrian Armed Forces and Da'esh, and continues to be determined to take strict measures against these crimes. In July 2017, the EU imposed additional restrictive measures on Syrian high-level officials and scientists for their role in the development and use of chemical weapons against the civilian population. Further sanctions are under consideration to ensure that there is no room for impunity. The EU calls upon all countries to use their influence to prevent any further use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime and calls on the regime's allies, notably Russia, to exercise appropriate pressure on the Syrian regime to this end.

The Candidate Countries Turkey, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, Montenegro* and Albania*, the country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the EFTA countries Iceland and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine align themselves with this Declaration.

*The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

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