

Declaration to the Press by Jean-Yves Le Drian, Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, on the situation in Syria - 14 April 2018

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Ladies and gentlemen,

The President of the Republic has observed that the use of chemical weapons in the city of Douma, near Damascus, on 7 April during an offensive by the Assad regime's forces, was both proven and attributable to the Syrian regime. This chemical attack killed dozens of people – at least 45 according to converging medical sources on the ground – and injured hundreds more. The red line declared by the President in May 2017 has been crossed.

We said that such a transgression would not go unanswered. We have noted the systematic deadlock at the Security Council. We have therefore acted in accordance with our word and our responsibility, in coordination with our allies.

Assad's regime has deliberately broken the taboo there has been on the use of chemical weapons since the beginning of the 20th century. For the last seven years, it has constantly breached international standards with the greatest disrespect for the law of war and basic humanity.

The chemical escalation in Syria is not acceptable.

It is not acceptable, because the use of chemical weapons is a violation of a fundamental standard of international law and humanitarian law.

The employment of these arms of terror is a transgression of some of the longest-standing conventions, including the 1925 Protocol prohibiting the use of chemical weapons in warfare. It violates the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), which was signed in Paris in 1993 and which Syria signed up to in 2013. The manufacture and use of such weapons is a threat to international peace and security. Those who contravene these laws choose to exclude themselves from the community of nations.

The chemical escalation is not acceptable, because the Syrian regime had committed to fully decommissioning its arsenal.

In September 2013, the Security Council took note of that commitment and decided in Resolution 2118 that Syria must keep to it, or else be subject to measures under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations. Chapter VII has a clear meaning: the use of military measures to compel those who threaten international peace and security.

The chemical escalation in Syria is not acceptable, because, since the declarations by the French President, everyone has been aware of the consequences of a violation of the commitments made by the Syrian regime before the international community. Bashar al-Assad's regime knew the risks it was taking when it again employed these odious weapons against its own people, choosing once more to ride roughshod over international law.

The action taken by our armed forces, whom I would like to commend as I know their professionalism and their cool-headedness in France's service, will be set out in a moment by Ms Florence Parly, Minister for the Armed Forces.

This action is legitimate. It aims to put an end to a serious violation of the law. It is limited to precise objectives: the destruction of the Syrian regime's chemical facilities, in order to stop it committing further chemical massacres and continuing its strategy of terror against its own people. It is proportionate, targeted action: it does not seek to hit Assad's allies or the civilian population, but rather to dissuade the Syrian regime from continuing such criminal acts. The Syrian regime has to stop employing such weapons.

The Syrian conflict has worsened and amplified constantly for seven years now. It is directly affecting the security of France and Europe. In this context, we have two priorities: combating jihadist groups, and Daesh in particular, and restoring stability, which requires a political solution. Only that political solution can bring peace and security for the Syrian people, for the region and for the international community.

That is why we are going to be taking political initiatives very swiftly. We have three imperatives:

- 1 – the verifiable and irreversible decommissioning of the Syrian chemical weapons programme.
- 2 – a ceasefire across the whole Syrian territory, and humanitarian access to civilian populations as required by UN Security Council resolutions. These resolutions have the value of international law and must apply to all. They have so far been ignored. We need to ensure they become effective.
- 3 – a crisis exit plan, which needs to be reached with a political solution. We are prepared to work on that immediately, with all countries that can contribute.