



**Open-ended Briefing on the International Partnership against
Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons**

By

Izumi Nakamitsu

Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs



United Nations
Geneva
28 February 2018

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for the invitation to this informal open-ended briefing today. The issue of the use of chemical weapons is one that has elicited a high degree of attention and the deepest concern within the international community, including from the Secretary-General himself.

The Secretary-General stated unequivocally that “impunity cannot be tolerated” when it comes to the use of chemical weapons. I have said the same on many occasions and in particular when addressing the Security Council on this issue, as I do regularly.

It is shocking that, nearly one hundred years after the end of World War I and a few years later, the adoption of the Geneva Protocol, the use of chemical weapons continues to recur. In 1997, when the Chemical Weapons Convention entered into force, we assumed that by 2018, one century after the end of World War I, we would feel secure in the knowledge that one of the most terrible weapons of that war had been consigned to the past, once and for all.

The use of chemical weapons in conflict would have been almost unthinkable only a decade ago. The end of the mandate of the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) was the end of clarity on what would be the coordinated response of the international community to the continuing use of chemical weapons in Syria. At the moment, there is no mechanism for the international community to tackle the challenge of attribution when the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission concludes that an incident has involved – or likely involved – the use of chemical weapons.

For us this is a challenge that goes beyond Syria. It is about restoring the universal norm against these weapons, as represented by the CWC.

I would like to quote a recent remark made by the Secretary-General in this regard:

“In the Syrian conflict, the use of chemical weapons seriously challenges the global taboo against these weapons of mass destruction. If the use of chemical weapons in Syria is once again determined, the international community needs to find an appropriate way to identify those responsible and hold them to account. Without such an avenue, we are allowing the use of chemical weapons to take place with impunity. I hope the Council can return to unity on this issue.”

I would like to echo the Secretary-General and express my hope that the Security Council finds the necessary unity, as indeed has been the case in the past. A mechanism for accountability cannot be optional, and the consequences of inaction may be far-reaching and severe; we must also not forget our moral responsibility to the victims.

Let me close by assuring you of the commitment of the United Nations to work with all members of the United Nations to restore the taboo against chemical weapons and to ensure that those responsible for their use – having violated such a profound international norm – are held to account.

Thank you.
