

Towards accountability and the verifiable destruction of Syria's chemical weapons programme

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Speech

Statement by Fergus Eckersley, UK Political Coordinator at the UN, at the Security Council briefing on Syria's use of chemical weapons

From:

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Thank you Mr President and I'd like to thank Ms Nakamitsu for her briefing. We also thank Director-General Arias for his monthly report. And we congratulate him on his reappointment as Director-General last week, demonstrating the overwhelming support

of OPCW States Parties for his leadership. We also welcome the adoption of the OPCW's budget, which will ensure the ability of the Technical Secretariat, including the Investigation and Identification Team, to carry out its important disarmament functions.

This month's report demonstrates yet again how the OPCW has attempted to discharge those functions, while Syria has again failed to engage on process, let alone on substance.

We regret that due to Syria's repeated refusal to issue visas for the Technical Secretariat, the Declaration Assessment Team has been unable to deploy to Syria for many months.

As the Director-General observes in his report, the substance of the 20 outstanding issues with Syria's initial declaration are a significant cause for concern, this includes the undeclared production and weaponisation of toxic chemicals, including nerve agents, and the unknown whereabouts of significant quantities of chemical warfare agents and precursors.

The Syrian regime has been found by both the UN and the OPCW to have used chemical weapons on at least 8 occasions during the conflict and the actual number may be much more than that as we've heard from others today. The outstanding issues therefore constitute an ongoing threat to international peace and security and a challenge to this Council's authority.

The 30th November marked the annual day of remembrance for all victims of chemical weapons. We should take this moment to remember those Syrians killed and affected by Syrian regime and ISIL chemical weapons attacks. We cannot undo the damage done but we can and should ensure accountability for the use of chemical weapons. And we can and should demand adherence to resolution 2118 and the verifiable destruction of Syria's chemical weapons programme.

Instead, significant energy is expended in this Council in spinning conspiracies and undermining the OPCW and the Chemical Weapons Convention, all to protect a regime at the expense of the Syrian people and international security. If that energy was expended in upholding Council resolutions and persuading the Syrian regime to meet its obligations, perhaps progress could be made towards resolving this issue.

We therefore once again urge the Syrian authorities to take substantive steps to comply with its obligations. And we reaffirm our commitment to a Council united in ending the threat of chemical weapons in Syria.

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