

OPCW Charges Syrian Regime with Chemical Weapons Attack

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On April 12, 2021, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) released its second report attributing yet another chemical weapons attack in Syria to the Assad regime. The IIT report concluded there are reasonable grounds to believe that on February 4, 2018, in Saraqib, Syria, the Syrian Arab Air Force dropped a cylinder containing chlorine, which dispersed over a large area. This act imposed deliberate and unconscionable suffering on Syrian victims.

This latest finding should come as a surprise to no one. The Assad regime is responsible for innumerable atrocities, some of which rise to the level of war crimes and crimes against humanity. The regime has consistently responded with death and destruction to calls by the Syrian people for reform and change. These well-documented atrocities include the use of chemical weapons, and this most recent report follows the first from IIT last year that attributed three other chemical weapons attacks to the Assad regime.

The United States concurs with the OPCW's conclusions cited in this report and continues to assess that the Assad regime retains sufficient chemicals to use sarin, to produce and deploy chlorine munitions, and to develop new chemical weapons. Despite the OPCW's efforts to induce Syria to adhere to its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention and UN Security Council Resolution 2118, the Assad regime continues to ignore calls from the international community to fully disclose and verifiably destroy its chemical weapons program. The OPCW report is but the latest reminder of Assad's flagrant repudiation of the rule of law.

The United States supports the impartial and independent work of the OPCW, particularly the IIT Fact-Finding Mission and Declaration Assessment Team. We applaud the OPCW's leadership and Technical Secretariat for the professional manner in which they carry out their mission. To be clear, no amount of disinformation, conspiracy theories or distortion of the facts by the regime or its enablers can argue away Assad's crimes. The United States condemns the use of chemical weapons, by anyone, anywhere at any time. The use of chemical weapons by any state or non-state actor presents an unacceptable security threat to all states and cannot occur with impunity.

All responsible nations must stand in solidarity against the deployment of chemical weapons by preserving the global norm against such use; and we must be ready to hold the Assad regime, and anyone who chooses to use these horrific weapons, accountable.