

Syria / Chemical Attacks in Douma (7 April) : Joint Statement by France and 16 other member countries of OPCW (26 April 2018)

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On 26 April, Russia decided to hold an "information" meeting at the headquarters of the OPCW (The Hague) with Syrian "witnesses".

France and 16 other OPCW member countries denounced this propaganda exercise in a statement (see below).

As the Permanent Representative of France to the OPCW, Mr Philippe Lalliot said, this meeting was nothing more than an obscene masquerade: *“This does not come as a surprise from the Syrian government, which has massacred and gassed its own people for the last seven years. It must be answerable for its actions. We will make sure of it. Russia’s actions are more surprising, and they will not fool anybody with such crude tactics.”*

France and its partners reaffirm their full support for the investigation conducted by the OPCW despite all attempts at propaganda and obstruction.

Syria / OPCW - Joint Statement (April 26, 2018)

Joint Statement by Australia, Bulgaria, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America

OPCW investigators have been in Syria for two weeks now. They are conducting their work in extremely difficult circumstances. They have our full support. Instead of working with the OPCW to support their investigation, Syria and Russia have continued to create obstacles to delay their deployment to Duma and to wage a propaganda campaign against the OPCW. Australia, Bulgaria, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America, the signatories of this joint declaration and States Parties to the Convention for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, wish here to spotlight and call for an end to such

unacceptable Russian defamation of the OPCW. Today, Russia has decided to hold a so-called information meeting at OPCW headquarters that is nothing more than a crude propaganda exercise.

Worse, by presenting the briefing in the OPCW premises, Russia is trying to create the false impression that the OPCW has convened this meeting at Russia's request. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Director General of the OPCW has made a clear point of distancing himself from this event. He informed Russia that such a meeting, in which "witnesses" will claim to have been hired to simulate a chemical weapons attack, runs against the work currently being carried out in Syria by OPCW investigators, and that if these "witnesses" have useful information on the incident, they should first be presented to the FFM to be interviewed.

The authenticity of the information gathered to date on the chemical attacks that occurred in Duma on 7 April, through numerous testimonies, is unassailable. Medical NGOs have found traces of chemical agents on the victims. Photographs and videos, numerous and mutually reinforcing, have been authenticated. The symptoms of more than 500 patients who presented on the same day of the attack in health care facilities undoubtedly corresponded to gas intoxication. The WHO has expressed its concern at reports from its partners of patients exhibiting signs and symptoms consistent with exposure to toxic chemicals. We expect this information to be tested and verified by the FFM through its independent examination.

Obstruction, propaganda, misinformation are attempts to undermine the multilateral framework. We call on Russia to cooperate fully with the OPCW, as it has repeatedly claimed to want to do and as required by its international commitments. We also call on Russia to exercise its responsibility to urge Syria to fully honor its commitments under the CWC.

We reiterate our full support for the Director-General of the OPCW and the Technical Secretariat and to express our full confidence in the work of the OPCW.