Foreign Minister Steinmeier on the destruction of Syrian chemical weapons

2014-08-20

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Foreign Minister Steinmeier issued the following statement on 19 August on the completion of the destruction of Syrian chemical weapons on board the American vessel Cape Ray:

The fact that the Syrian regime’s most dangerous chemical weapons have now been neutralised is an important step and a major achievement. This shows what the international community is capable of when it is united.

Following the fundamental agreement between the United States and Russia just under a year ago, the United Nations and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (

OPCW

), along with a large number of other countries, conducted an unprecedented operation. From the beginning, Germany has provided substantial support in the form of financial, logistical and technical expertise.

Germany is assuming responsibility by taking part in the protective escort for the American MV Cape Ray, where the weapons were destroyed, and by disposing of 370 tonnes of waste materials. Starting in September, GEKA, the German state-owned company responsible for disposing of chemical warfare agents, will undertake this task.

The United States, which very quickly provided the equipment to destroy these weapons on board the MV Cape Ray, deserves the greatest respect. However, many other countries also played a part in the success of this operation. The Nordic countries, as well as Russia and China, provided security during the transport of the chemical weapons, while Italy provided a port for their transfer. Some of the weapons stockpile was also neutralised in Finland, the United Kingdom and the United States.

All of this has shown that the international community is no longer willing to tolerate the use of chemical weapons under any circumstances. Fortunately, weapons of mass destruction are now an absolute taboo!

We have not forgotten, however, that murder is continuing in Syria with other means, but with no less brutality. We must display the same unity and determination in our endeavours to find a political solution to this bloody conflict.

Background information:

The chemical warfare agents were neutralised in international waters in the eastern Mediterranean on board the American MV Cape Ray, using a special method (hydrolysis). As a result, the agents can no longer be used as weapons. No chemical substances were released during the operation. The hydrolysis process was completed on 18 August 2014.

The military protection of the Cape Ray took the form of a multinational protective escort operation. Germany has deployed a Bundeswehr frigate (currently the Schleswig-Holstein), thus providing the second-largest number of troops after the United States.

Some of the waste materials produced during the hydrolysis process, around 370 tonnes of hydrolysate, as well as the solid material left over from the hydrolysis, will be destroyed by the German government-owned company GEKA mbh in Munster, Lower Saxony. GEKA is responsible for disposing of chemical warfare agents. This work will be done in an environmentally sustainable manner and will take around five months. Hydrolysate is similar to industrial chemical waste.

Germany is also supporting the elimination of Syrian chemical weapons in the following ways:

- Funding of 5 million euros to the

OPCW

for the destruction of Syrian chemical weapons. At the German Government’s initiative, the

EU

also provided 12 million euros to the

OPCW

’s Syria Trust Fund for the Destruction of Chemical Weapons.

- Participation of German research institutes and laboratories in the testing of chemical weapon samples from Syria (see the Sellström report).

- Logistical support for

OPCW

inspectors (airlifts; security training at the Bundeswehr Training College in Hammelburg).

- Emergency medical assistance (medication for emergency treatment, medical equipment) to Syrian hospitals to treat patients suffering from the effects of nerve gas.

Overview "Newsroom"

Source : https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/newsroom/news/140819-syrien-chemiewaffen-vernichtung-264468