Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

"Make no mistake, the JIM has succeeded; it is Russia that has failed"

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Thank you Mr President.

Today we have reached the end of the road for the Joint Investigative Mechanism. It was a road that all members of this Council set out on together two years ago. We did so in the hope that those using chemical weapons in Syria would be identified and held to account. Thanks to today's veto, that hope has suffered a serious blow.

The staff of the JIM, under the current and previous leadership panels, worked patiently, diligently to uncover the truth. I pay tribute to them today. Thanks to their efforts, the world now knows what happened in Talamenas, in Sarmin, in Marea, in Qaminas, in Khan Sheikhoun and in Um Housh.

Make no mistake, the JIM has succeeded; it is Russia that has failed.

They have failed in their duties as a permanent member of this Security Council, they have failed as a state party to the Chemical Weapons Convention, they have failed as a supposed supporter of peace in Syria.

We've been here before. This isn't the first time this year that we have attempted to renew the JIM's mandate. Less than a month ago, we all sat in this very chamber and watched as Russia vetoed a simple technical rollover of the mandate; a rollover that didn't judge any party, that didn't add any conditions.

We have worked tirelessly, through extensive consultations between Council members, to try to understand Russia's concerns and find a renewal on which we could all agree. The US draft, which we were proud to vote for, was balanced and reasonable.

Russia, on the other hand, has refused to engage constructively. Last month they quoted fantasy and fiction in this Chamber to justify their veto. But in negotiations their experts made abundantly clear why they wouldn't support the JIM's renewal. Put simply, they cannot, or rather, they will not accept any investigation that attributes blame to their Syrian allies, no matter how robust the investigation, no matter how clear and solid the evidence.

Russia will say that they engaged, that they put forward an alternative text. Yet their text only sought to undermine and discredit what has already been painstakingly demonstrated - that the Syrian regime is responsible for the blatant, repeated use of chemical weapons against its own people.

The 7th report of the JIM, as we heard last week from the head of the Leadership Panel, details the thorough methodology of the investigation, its consideration of alternative hypotheses, the careful corroboration of sources, and use of independent, internationally-recognised forensic experts for analysis of data.

Faced with this clear, careful consideration and conclusion, Russia made a string of entirely destructive demands in its text and attempted to weaken significantly the remit of the JIM. They demanded that the JIM take samples from a Syrian airbase when the JIM has been crystal clear as to why doing so would not advance the investigation. They demanded that the JIM visit Khan Sheikhoun, where they will face unacceptable risks of attack.

They maligned the impartiality, experience, and expertise of the JIM's staff, ignoring the thorough, professional report they have produced and Russia's own original support for the group. Russia demands the JIM listen only to Syrian-approved witnesses, and Syrian accounts of events.

Why should evidence from a party to the conflict, accused of war crimes, carry more weight than the corroborated testimony of victims and observers, and cold laboratory analysis of physical evidence?

Thanks to Russia's veto today, Daesh fighters will be joining Assad in celebration. The OPCW is currently investigating other cases. This vote means the JIM will not investigate who was responsible for these atrocious crimes.

Russia's transparent use of its Security Council status to block this investigation again shows that, as a party to the conflict, it cannot credibly play a leading role in the political process, such as convening the Syrian parties in Sochi.

Mr President, most of us here are totally committed to upholding the norm against the use of chemical weapons. We will not be stopped by what has happened today. We will keep working to identify and bring to account those who have used these vile weapons, and to deter those who might think of doing so in future.

Russia once played a responsible role in securing the destruction of much of Syria's chemical arsenal and in creating the JIM. Regrettably, today the world can see that Russian policy now is to protect the Syrian state, whatever the cost to Russia's reputation.

Thank you.

Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/make-no-mistake-the-jim-has-succeeded-it-is-russia-that-has-failed