



**Briefing to the Security Council on the implementation of Security Council
resolution 2118 (2013) on the elimination of the chemical weapons
programme of the Syrian Arab Republic**

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Virtual Briefing
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Mr. President,

Distinguished Members of the Security Council,

I thank you for the opportunity to brief the Council on the implementation of Security Council resolution 2118 (2013) on the elimination of the chemical weapons programme of the Syrian Arab Republic. I hope that today's format will allow for a substantive, informative and civil debate on this important international security issue.

It is a pleasure to be joined here today, virtually, by the Director-General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), His Excellency, Mr. Fernando Arias, who will update the Council on the elimination of the Syrian Arab Republic chemical weapons programme.

Since my last briefing on 5 November 2020, the Office for Disarmament Affairs has continued to maintain regular contact with counterparts at the OPCW on its activities related to this matter. On 2nd December 2020, the Office for Disarmament Affairs received information from the Permanent Mission of the Syrian Arab Republic concerning chemical issues for this period. This information was studied carefully and also forwarded to the OPCW Technical Secretariat.

Mr. President,

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact the OPCW's ability to deploy to the Syrian Arab Republic. Nonetheless, the Technical Secretariat has continued with its mandated activities related to the elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme and its engagement with the Syrian Arab Republic in this regard.

The OPCW Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) continues its efforts to clarify all outstanding issues regarding the Syrian Arab Republic's initial declaration to the OPCW. Per my last briefing to the Council, the DAT deployed to Damascus from 22 September to 3 October 2020 to conduct the twenty-third round of consultations with the Syrian National Authority. As reported to the Executive Council, through an Addendum dated 18 November 2020 to the Note by the Director-General entitled "Report on the Work of the Declaration Assessment Team" (EC-95/HP/DG.2, dated 1 October 2020), and through a further Note by the OPCW Director-General entitled "Report on the Work of the Declaration Assessment Team" (EC-95/HP/DG.3, dated 18 November 2020), some progress was made during this

round of consultations, with three outstanding issues related to the Syrian National Authority's initial declaration closed. However, as the OPCW Director-General also reported, 19 issues remain outstanding.

Consequently, the OPCW Technical Secretariat continues to assess that, at this stage, due to the identified gaps, inconsistencies, and discrepancies that remain unresolved, the declaration submitted by the Syrian Arab Republic cannot be considered accurate and complete in accordance with the Chemical Weapons Convention. During the September-October deployment, the DAT also collected samples to replace those taken during its previous deployment.

Mr. President,

I am sure that the OPCW Director-General will provide an update on the activities conducted by the Technical Secretariat, including in relation to the seventh round of inspections of the Barzah and Jamrayah facilities of the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Centre (SSRC) conducted by the OPCW Technical Secretariat between 8 and 13 November 2020.

Pursuant to OPCW Executive Council decision EC-M-43/DEC.1 dated 24 July 2014, the OPCW Technical Secretariat has been monitoring and maintaining the remote monitoring systems installed at four sealed underground structures on the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic. In accordance with the Executive Council decision, the OPCW Technical Secretariat deployed to the Syrian Arab Republic between 15 and 18 November 2020 to conduct its final visit to the underground structures and to observe the removal of the monitoring equipment. I understand that the Syrian Arab Republic was informed by the OPCW Technical Secretariat that the underground structures should remain sealed as part of the destruction plan agreed by the OPCW Executive Council.

I note that the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) remains in the process of studying all available information related to allegations of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic, and continues its engagement with the Syrian Government and other States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention with regard to a "variety of incidents". As previously reported further FFM deployments will be subject to the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) continues its investigations into incidents in which the FFM has determined that chemical weapons were used or likely used in the Syrian Arab Republic and will issue further reports in due course.

I take this opportunity to once again reiterate my full support for the integrity, professionalism, impartiality, objectivity, and independence of the work of the OPCW.

With regard to the implementation of OPCW Executive Council decision EC-94/DEC.2 entitled “Addressing the Possession and Use of Chemical Weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic”, I look forward to Director-General Arias’ update on this matter.

Mr. President,

Distinguished Members of the Security Council,

Before closing, I wish to echo the Secretary-General’s message on the Day of Remembrance for all Victims of Chemical Warfare, commemorated on 30 November: “The use of chemical weapons anywhere, by anyone, under any circumstances, is intolerable and a serious violation of international law. There can be no justification for the use of these abhorrent weapons. We must remain united and determined in preventing their use, or the threat of their use. It is imperative that those who use, or have used, chemical weapons are identified and held accountable. That is the only way to meet our moral responsibility to the victims of chemical warfare.” As the Secretary-General urged on the occasion, “let us renew our unequivocal commitment to the Chemical Weapons Convention and our support to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.”

I thank you very much for your attention.