

PRESS RELEASE

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Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the EU on the investigation of chemical weapons use in Syria

The failure to reach an agreement on the renewal of the mandate of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons – United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) before it expired on 17 November undermines attempts to ensure accountability for the use of chemical weapons in Syria. This damages efforts to consolidate the international chemical non-proliferation regime. It is of grave concern to the European Union (EU). In this regard, the EU regrets the Russian vetoes.

The EU highly commends the independence of the JIM and the work that it has conducted in difficult conditions. By using a well-established methodology, it has delivered substantial reports confirming four chemical weapons attacks by the Syrian Armed Forces, including the horrific attack on Khan Sheikoun on 4 April 2017, and two by Da'esh.

The EU encourages the Security Council to continue working to find an agreement to continue international investigations to attribute responsibility for chemical weapons use based on key principles laid out in UN Security Council Resolutions 2235 (2015) and 2319 (2016).

The use of chemical weapons by anyone, be it a State or non-State actors, anywhere and under any circumstances is contrary to international law and must be investigated and condemned. The EU will use every means at its disposal to ensure that there is no room for impunity and that those responsible for such acts are sanctioned accordingly.

The EU has repeatedly taken action against any confirmed use of chemical weapons by the Syrian Armed Forces and Da'esh, by imposing restrictive measures, most recently in July 2017 and will continue to do so. The EU emphasises the need for accountability for crimes involving breaches of international law in Syria, and reiterates its support for the work of bodies such as the Commission of Inquiry and the International Impartial and Independent Mechanism in this regard.

The gravity of the situation emphasises, once again, that only a political solution, as defined in the UNSCR 2254 and the 2012 Geneva Communiqué will ensure lasting stability of Syria and enable a decisive defeat of Da'esh and other UN-designated terrorist groups in Syria. Any initiative to consolidate the ceasefire, support the response to the humanitarian crisis or encourage dialogue between parties, should be in support of the UN-led Geneva process.

The Candidate Countries Turkey, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, Montenegro* and Albania*, the EFTA countries Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova align themselves with this Declaration.

*The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

Press office - General Secretariat of the Council

Rue de la Loi 175 - B-1048 BRUSSELS - Tel.: +32 (0)2 281 6319

press@consilium.europa.eu - www.consilium.europa.eu/press