



**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 Council members for the opportunity to brief you again on the implementation of Security Council resolution 2118 (2013) on the elimination of the chemical weapons programme of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Since the last Security Council meeting on resolution 2118 held on 6 April 2021, the Office for Disarmament Affairs has maintained regular contact with counterparts at the OPCW on its activities related to this matter and, consistent with established practice, I held a monthly call with the OPCW Director-General yesterday, on 5 May 2021, to receive an update and ascertain his views.

Mr. President,

As I have previously informed the Council, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has affected the OPCW's Technical Secretariat's ability to deploy to the Syrian Arab Republic. Nevertheless, the Secretariat maintains its readiness for deployments, which are being conducted subject to the evolution of the pandemic. Despite the travel restrictions, the Technical Secretariat has undertaken its mandated activities related to the elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme and its engagement with the Syrian Arab Republic in this regard.

Efforts by the OPCW Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) are still ongoing to clarify all the outstanding issues regarding the initial declaration by the Syrian Arab Republic to the OPCW. With regard to the issue of a former chemical weapons production facility (CWPF) that was declared as never having been used to produce and/or weaponize chemical weapons, the Syrian Arab Republic has reiterated that this CWPF was never used for the production of chemical weapons. However, the OPCW Technical Secretariat remains of the position that the Syrian Arab Republic must declare all chemical warfare agents produced and/or weaponised at this site.

I am advised that, during the twenty-third round of consultations held in September 2020 between the DAT and the Syrian National Authority, the DAT collected samples from several large volume containers in the Syrian Arab Republic. On 8 March 2021, the OPCW Technical Secretariat received a note verbale from the Syrian Arab Republic containing explanations regarding the results of the analysis of those samples. I have been advised that the DAT conducted a detailed analysis of all the information provided by the Syrian National Authority and assessed that the aforementioned explanations are not sufficient to explain the results from the sample analysis.

According to the OPCW Technical Secretariat, one of the chemicals detected in these samples is a neat chemical warfare agent, the production of which has not been declared by the Syrian Arab Republic. The presence of this chemical inside storage containers of large volume at a previously declared chemical weapons facility may imply undeclared production activities. Consequently, through a note verbale dated 16 April 2021, the OPCW Technical Secretariat informed the Syrian Arab Republic that a new outstanding issue would be opened and would be discussed at the next round of consultations with the DAT. These are currently planned to take place in mid-May 2021.

As a result of the identified gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies that remain unresolved, the OPCW Technical Secretariat continues to assess that, at this stage, the declaration submitted by the Syrian Arab Republic cannot be considered accurate and complete in accordance with the Chemical Weapons Convention.

The number of outstanding issues and their nature is concerning. I reiterate my call to the Syrian Arab Republic to extend its full cooperation to the OPCW Technical Secretariat to resolve all outstanding issues. As I have noted on many prior occasions, the confidence of the international community in the complete elimination of Syria's chemical weapons programme depends upon these issues being finalized.

Mr. President,

I have been advised that the outcome of 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 in November 2020 will be reported to the OPCW

Executive Council in due course. The conduct of further deployments remains subject to the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic.

I am advised that the Syrian Arab Republic has yet to provide sufficient technical information or explanations that would enable the OPCW Technical Secretariat to close the issue related to the finding of a Schedule 2 chemical detected at the Barzah facilities of the SSRC during the third round of inspections held in 2018.

With regard to the work of the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission (FFM), I note that the 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, quote, “variety of incidents”, unquote. I have been advised that the FFM deployed to the Syrian Arab Republic between 29 March and 13 April 2021 to collect information and conduct interviews regarding an incident that took place in Kafr Zita, Hama, on 1 October 2016. The results of its activities will be reported by the FFM to the OPCW Executive Council in due course.

Mr. President,

On 12 April 2021, the OPCW Technical Secretariat submitted to the OPCW Executive Council, and to the UN Secretary-General, the Note entitled Second Report by the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team Pursuant to Paragraph 10 of Decision C-SS-4/DEC.3 “Addressing the Threat from Chemical Weapons Use”.

The second report of the IIT presents the findings of investigations conducted during the period between April 2020 and March 2021, focusing on the incident in Saraqib, in the Syrian Arab Republic, on 4 February 2018.

As noted in the IIT report, on the basis of all the information obtained and analysed, the IIT concluded that, and I quote, “there are reasonable grounds to believe that at approximately 21:22 on 4 February 2018, during ongoing attacks against Saraqib, a military helicopter of the Syrian Arab Air Force under the control of the Tiger Forces hit eastern Saraqib by dropping at least one cylinder. The cylinder ruptured and released a toxic gas, chlorine, which

dispersed over a large area affecting 12 named individuals”. Unquote.

Mr. President,

The findings of the IIT second report are deeply concerning. There is no justification for the use of toxic chemicals as weapons by anyone, anywhere and under any circumstances. With the submission of the IIT’s second report, I want to reiterate my full support for the integrity, professionalism, impartiality, objectivity, and independence of the work of the OPCW.

Mr. President,

The Office for Disarmament Affairs has taken note of the decision entitled “Addressing the Possession and Use of Chemical Weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic” (C-25/DEC.9, dated 21 April 2021), adopted at the twenty-fifth session of the Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention suspending the rights and privileges of the Syrian Arab Republic under the Convention. According to paragraph 8 of this decision, the rights and privileges of the Syrian Arab Republic will be reinstated once the OPCW Director-General has reported to the Executive Council that the Syrian Arab Republic has completed all of the measures contained in paragraph 5 of Executive Council decision EC-94/DEC.2. I therefore urge the Syrian Arab Republic to cooperate fully with the OPCW Technical Secretariat in that regard.

Mr. President,

Distinguished Members of the Security Council,

Any use of chemical weapons is totally unacceptable and a serious violation of international law. Those responsible for the use of chemical weapons must be held accountable, no matter who they are. If we cannot do so, we allow the use of chemical weapons to take place with impunity, something that must not be tolerated. It is my sincere hope that members of this Council will unite on this issue. The Office for Disarmament Affairs stands ready to provide whatever support and assistance it can.

I thank you very much for your attention.