



## **IIT Coordinator's Remarks on the First Report by the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team**

8 April 2020

Your Excellencies,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Today, on 8 April 2020, I have presented to the Director-General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), in my capacity as Coordinator of the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) of the OPCW Secretariat, the IIT's first report on three incidents where the OPCW Fact Finding Mission (FFM) had determined that chemical weapons had been used or likely used in the Syrian Arab Republic.

My remarks today are a presentation and a simple summary of the report, not an authoritative version of its findings, which I invite you to read in their entirety.

The IIT was established as part of the OPCW Technical Secretariat pursuant to the Decision of the OPCW Conference of States Parties titled "Addressing the Threat from Chemical Weapons Use" (C-SS-4/DEC.3) adopted on 27 June 2018. The IIT was established in order to identify the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons where the FFM had determined that chemical weapons had been used or likely been used in the Syrian Arab Republic and for which the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) had not issued a report identifying perpetrators.

The establishment of the IIT, which was completed in June 2019, resulted in a small, professional, and dedicated team of staff members and other experts supporting it, currently representing all geographical areas of the world, and with a gender balance of 55% female and 45% male.

In its first report, the IIT presents its findings on the investigation of three incidents where chemical weapons were used in the town of Ltamenah, located within the Hama governorate, in the Syrian Arab Republic, on 24, 25 and 30 March 2017 respectively.

The IIT is tasked to reach findings of fact only; not legal findings on responsibility of States or non-state actors, or for recommendations for future action –as these are all issues that appertain to the Executive Council and to the Conference of States Parties of the OPCW, and other bodies, as appropriate.

These nine months of investigations and analyses included an extensive review of all the information obtained, including: interviews with persons who were present in the relevant places at the time of the incidents, analysis of samples and remnants collected at the sites of the incidents, review of the symptomatology reported by casualties and medical staff, examination of imagery, including satellite images, and extensive consultations of experts. Crucially, the investigation relied on the relevant FFM reports, as well as on the samples and

other material obtained by the Technical Secretariat directly in the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic.

On this basis, the IIT has concluded that there are reasonable grounds to believe that the perpetrators of use of sarin as a chemical weapon in Ltamenah on 24 and 30 March 2017, and of chlorine as a chemical weapon on 25 March 2017, were individuals belonging to the Syrian Arab Air Force.

More specifically, in relation to the incident of 25 March 2017, the IIT concluded that there are reasonable grounds to believe that a helicopter of the Syrian Arab Air Force departing from Hama airbase, dropped a cylinder on the Ltamenah hospital. The cylinder broke into the hospital through its roof, ruptured, and released chlorine, affecting at least 30 persons. The flight path of the helicopter was established on the basis of several reports as well as information from persons who were present at the time in the area. A thorough examination of the cylinder that hit the hospital by two different sets of experts and specialists, analyses of environmental samples, and a review of the symptoms of the casualties were part of the overall information considered by the IIT to reach the conclusion.

In relation to the two incidents of 24 and 30 March 2017, the IIT concluded that at approximately 6:00 on both days, an Su-22 military airplane belonging to the 50th Brigade of the 22nd Air Division of the Syrian Arab Air Force, departing from Shayrat airbase, dropped an M4000 aerial bomb containing sarin near Ltamenah, affecting at least 16 and 60 individuals, respectively.

The IIT came to these conclusions also on the basis of the fact that the sarin used in Ltamenah on 24 and 30 March 2017 was produced, according to experts from OPCW Designated Laboratories, via routes and with precursors and raw materials that are the same as those used and found in the Syrian stockpile. The type of sarin used in both incidents is not known to have been developed and manufactured by States or entities other than the Syrian Arab Republic. Additionally, metal fragments found at or in the vicinity of the sites where the attacks took place are, according to experts and specialists consulted by the IIT, most likely parts of an aerial bomb, the M4000, produced only by the Syrian Arab Republic. In addition, witness testimonies and flight data from various sources place an Su-22, flown in this theatre of operation only by the Syrian Arab Air Force, at the right place, and at the right time, on both days.

Several other aspects are scrutinised in the body of the report, paying specific attention to the chain of custody of the samples and fragments in question and the overall situation in the area at the time. All of these elements are consistent with the findings made by the IIT. Other scenarios became increasingly less likely as not substantiated by the information obtained as the investigation progressed. In the end, the IIT was unable to identify any other plausible explanation.

The IIT thus reached its conclusions in all three incidents after a thorough and comprehensive examination of different theories or scenarios, transparently presented both in general terms and with specific reference to each of the incidents considered. In assessing the information obtained and the expert reports received, the IIT specifically considered allegations that the incidents had been “staged”, and that no aerial chemical attack had taken place. It also considered that the use of chemical weapons in these three incidents could, in theory, have

been organised and carried out through a formal chain of command or a de facto structure, or could have been carried out by independent, “rogue”, units. These scenarios were found as unsubstantiated on the basis of the information and evidence obtained by the IIT.

Despite its efforts in this respect, the IIT was not able to make factual findings to the requisite degree of certainty in relation to the specific chain of command for the orders related to the three attacks in Ltamenah on 24, 25 and 30 March 2017, nor could it reach definitive conclusions on the exact chain of command relevant to these three incidents. It however considered that attacks of such strategic nature would have only taken place on the basis of orders from the higher authorities of the Syrian Arab Republic military command, and that even if authority can be delegated, responsibility cannot.

Reaching the conclusions on the three incidents in Ltamenah in March 2017 included interviewing 20 witnesses in five different countries (and obtaining access to several other witness statements taken previously by other entities), requesting analysis of samples from six OPCW Designated laboratories, and consulting with a host of other technical institutions and experts, including on matters and issues ranging from language, forensic sciences, metallurgy, military issues, medical questions related symptoms linked to possible use of chemical weapons, chemistry, meteorology, and ballistics. This resulted in more than 10,000 files, for a total amount of about 2.4 terabytes in relation to the three Ltamenah incidents of March 2017. The IIT is therefore grateful for all the genuine support and robust assistance received from States Parties and other entities.

In preparation of this report, the IIT had to face—among other challenges—the lack of access to the Syrian Arab Republic and to its authorities despite numerous requests (documented in an Annex to the report), the obligations of States Parties to cooperate with the Secretariat of the OPCW as mandated by the Chemical Weapons Convention to which Syria acceded in 2013, and to the specific decision of the UN Security Council in resolution 2118 (2013). The IIT, however, did not draw any conclusion in relation to its factual findings from this lack of cooperation.

During its work, the IIT was careful to openly and transparently present its work methodologies in two Notes distributed to all OPCW Member States; it explicitly welcomed input from all Member States, and answered questions whenever asked.

As required in the Conference’s decision of 27 June 2018, this first report is provided to the OPCW Executive Council for its consideration.

As required by the same decision, the report is also provided to the UN Secretary-General. I thank you all for your attention.

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