



Remarks of the Director-General at the Briefing for States Parties on Syrian Arab Republic: Update on IIT-FFM-SSRC-DAT

28 May 2019

Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates and Colleagues,

During the first part of this meeting, which is aimed at giving you updated information, I will address two main issues:

- the Structured Dialogue with the Syrian authorities, and
- the public disclosure of an internal document related to the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) investigation in Douma.

I consider the engagement with the Syrian Arab Republic on chemical weapons issues a priority. Last summer, soon after my arrival at the Secretariat, I authorised contacts with the Syrian authorities to initiate a new and open dialogue to include the following topics:

- FFM working methods;
- the DAT and the outstanding issues related to the initial Syrian declaration and other submissions;
- biannual inspections to the SSRC;
- Investigation and Identification Team's upcoming tasks;
- and any other issues of interest.

The Syrian Arab Republic authorities welcomed the idea of what has since then been known as the Structured Dialogue.

The first meeting took place in Damascus last October.

The second meeting took place in The Hague last November when I met with Syrian Arab Republic Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr Faisal Mekdad. We agreed to address all issues related to chemical weapons in Syria, and to keep States Parties informed of our progress.

During the first week of February, I dispatched a delegation of the Secretariat to Beirut to address all these issues.

On 21 February, the Secretariat briefed the States Parties of the outcome of this round of discussions.

Following those meetings, the twentieth round of consultations of the DAT took place in The Hague, in March. These consultations helped identify ways forward to address gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies related to the Syrian initial declaration and subsequent submissions.

A plan of activities was discussed with the goal of accelerating progress. On this basis, the DAT was deployed to Damascus in April for the twentieth-first round of consultations. At that time, I was hoping that progress would be made with new information provided by the Syrian authorities about outstanding issues.

The next meeting of the Structured Dialogue was scheduled to take place in Damascus from 8 to 10 May, with an agenda similar to the one of the meeting in Beirut.

On 23 April, the Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic sent me a letter saying that due to the Syrian position on the decision adopted by the Conference of the States Parties (CSP) at its 4th Special Session, on 27 June last year, Syria refuses to recognise the decision and to deal with any of its subsequent implications and effects.

Proceeding from this, the Vice-Minister informed me of his refusal to issue a visa to the Coordinator of the IIT.

Additionally, I received two letters dated 9 May and 14 May from the Vice-Minister, informing of Syria's objection to grant the newly appointed members of the IIT access to any confidential information concerning the Syrian chemical dossier.

Through a letter dated 9 May addressed to the Vice-Minister, I recalled that all States Parties and the Secretariat have the obligation to implement the decision adopted by the Conference and that, as Director-General, I have the obligation to pursue its implementation.

At the same time, I invited the Vice-Minister to reconsider his position and assist and cooperate with the Technical Secretariat and I informed him of my decision to postpone the meeting of the Structured Dialogue that was scheduled to take place in May in Damascus.

In the meantime, the Secretariat remains available to receive a delegation in The Hague in order to solve this issue.

This is the current situation so far.

I will refer now to the disclosure of an internal document related to the FFM in Douma:

The Douma incident took place on 7 April 2018.

The members of the FFM were appointed and because of security reasons, they only had access to the site two weeks after the incident.

I started my duties on 25 July 2018. From then on, while ensuring the independence and impartiality of the work undertaken by the FFM, I had regular briefings with FFM leadership.

Because of the complexity of the investigation and the large amount of evidence collected, I was informed that the FFM would require more time to produce its final report.

In March 2019, I received the first indication that an internal document pertaining to the Douma incident, produced by a staff member could have been disclosed outside of the Secretariat. It should be noted that, the time of the FFM deployment in Douma in 2018, this staff member was a liaison officer at our Command Post Office in Damascus. As such, and as is customary with all deployments in Syria, he was tasked with temporarily assisting the FFM with information collection at some sites in Douma.

The document produced by this staff member pointed at possible attribution, which is outside of the mandate of the FFM with regard to the formulation of its findings. Therefore, I instructed that, beyond the copy that would exclusively be kept by the FFM, the staff member be advised to submit his assessment to the IIT, which he did, so that this document could later be used by the IIT.

As is the case with all FFM investigations, the Secretariat encourages serious and professional debates within, so all views, analysis, information and opinions are considered. This is what the FFM did with the information included in the publicly disclosed document; all available information was examined, weighed and deliberated. Diverse views were expressed, discussed and considered against the overall facts and evidence collected and analysed.

With regard to the ballistics data collected by the FFM, they were analysed by three external experts commissioned by the FFM, and working independently from one another. In the end, while using different methods and instruments, they all reached the same conclusions that can be found in the FFM final report.

When further evidence appeared that the document drafted by the staff member had been shared outside this framework, I considered I had sufficient information to authorise the initiation of an investigation to clarify the situation. At this moment, and consistent with my responsibilities as Director-General towards States Parties, actions had to be taken.

Taking into account that the issue is under investigation, I will not make any further commentaries or evaluations that could be incompatible with the requirements of the investigation. I intend to keep you informed about the outcome of the investigation, as appropriate, in due time.

I have provided all the information I have so far.

For now, I would like to reiterate that I stand by the impartial and professional conclusions of the FFM that there are reasonable grounds to believe that the use of a toxic chemical as a weapon took place in Douma on 7 April 2018. This toxic chemical contained reactive chlorine. The toxic chemical was likely molecular chlorine.

I remain available to all States Parties for further clarifications through bilateral discussions and written correspondence, as I have endeavoured to do since taking office.