



OPCW

Executive Council

Ninety-Fourth Session

7 – 9 July 2020

EC-94/NAT.40

7 July 2020

ENGLISH and RUSSIAN only

RUSSIAN FEDERATION

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR A.V. SHULGIN
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION TO THE
OPCW AT THE NINETY-FOURTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairperson,

Today's session of the Executive Council is taking place in challenging, unprecedented conditions. Many States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction (hereinafter, "the Convention") have introduced self-isolation regimes, and numerous restrictions remain in place to date. The delegations are taking part in events with truncated teams and without bringing in their experts from the capitals.

Difficult times often come all at once—there's no shortage of examples of this in history. This year, we are marking seventy-five years since the victory over Nazism. The participants of the anti-Hitler coalition stood side by side in the fight against that universal evil. The international community emerged from the Second World War more politically mature. It was then that the United Nations was established as the foundation upon which international relations have been built for three-fourths of a century now.

Right now, when our countries are going through challenging times, living through the repercussions of the coronavirus pandemic, one would hope to see greater solidarity among the States Parties to the Convention in tackling shared tasks.

However, this does not happen in practice, unfortunately. We have no choice but to state that the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) is divided and dysfunctional. Its Member States are speaking the same language less and less. The concept of a consensus has almost been forgotten, and many decisions are adopted by vote. As a result, the Organisation's reputation as an independent expert body in the field of chemical disarmament has been undermined. Those at fault for this state of affairs are the countries that are doing everything to turn this Organisation into a tool that they can use to achieve their own geopolitical goals. They are taking steps in a variety of areas, although the *pièce de résistance* of their efforts has become the establishment of the illegitimate attribution mechanism, in spite of the opinion of a large number of States. The assignment of attribution authorities to the Technical Secretariat is nothing other than an attempt to change the paradigm of the Organisation. I wish to once again emphasise that the Russian Federation—just like a number of other countries—does not recognise attribution on the arena of The Hague, and has no intention of working with the Investigation and Identification team (IIT) or funding its activities.



The first report of the IIT, which we will consider at this session, has only confirmed what was obvious from the very beginning: the IIT was assigned quasi-prosecutory tasks to discredit the lawfully elected authorities of the Syrian Arab Republic, and to accuse them of violating the Convention and the regulatory documents of the Organisation.

We have analysed the IIT's report. Russia's assessment on this matter is presented in a national document. Our main conclusion is that the accusations that the Syrian authorities used chemical weapons in Ltamenah are fabricated. The work that has been done by the IIT cannot be considered objective or professional.

The opponents of the Syrian authorities need any premise—even a contrived one—to interfere in the domestic affairs of Syria. We can recall the United States' air strike against al-Shayrat in April 2017, or the aggressive three-party coalition against targets of civil and military infrastructure in April 2018 after the high profile events in Douma.

The IIT is a clone of the former OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism in Syria, which completely discredited itself. This is clear based both on its membership, which is made up of representatives of Western countries and United States allies, and by its unsound working methods, such as remote, non-transparent investigations, which include the engagement of anonymous external experts and the flagrant violation of the fundamental principle of maintaining the chain of custody to ensure the preservation of material evidence.

As we know, the investigations are based on the reports of the Fact-Finding Mission's (FFM) investigations into the use of chemical weapons in Syria. This specialised mission has been facing a number of questions for some time now; these remain unanswered. What is the value of the FFM's reports on the events in Khan-Shaykhun, Ltamenah, Saraqib, and Douma? They all contain the message clearly pointing to the alleged "use" of toxic chemicals by Syrian Government forces. At the same time, the base of evidence is built only upon dubious witnesses of NGOs with various political affiliations, such as the "White Helmets", which are financed by Western countries and the terrorists that collaborate with them. In recent years, not one report has been released on the crimes involving the use of chemical weapons committed or orchestrated in Syria by terrorist and fundamentalist groups. And this is in spite of the fact that a great deal of substantiated evidence on this matter has been regularly submitted by the Syrian authorities.

The results of the FFM's activities in relation to the investigation into the events in Douma were particularly scandalous: the bald-faced manipulation of facts, behind-the-scenes machinations, slandering of experts who do not agree with the Douma report's final conclusions, and questions that remain unanswered—this has seriously undermined the Organisation's reputation.

The Technical Secretariat should urgently correct the work of the FFM in order to restore trust in it as an important working body capable of functioning without bias, strictly in line with the provisions of the Convention, and in the interests of the Organisation as a whole.

Taking into consideration the quality of the first IIT report, which features gaps, inconsistencies, and discrepancies, the States Parties should be provided with all of the technical data that the IIT used as a basis to come to its conclusion on the guilt of the military and political authorities of Syria. At the same time, even its experts had no choice but to admit that during the investigation, it was not possible to come to an unequivocal conclusion. For example, paragraph 8.35 of the report states: "[...] there is no single chemical that would unequivocally and directly indicate the use of chlorine gas and its origin".

That is why at this stage, there can be no discussion on the adoption of any decision, especially based on the draft decision that has been submitted for the Council's consideration, aimed at legitimising interference into the domestic affairs of Syria. This draft groundlessly sets unprecedented demands for Damascus, the military and chemical potential of which has already been destroyed under international control. If any State Party has any doubt as to that fact, then actions should be taken strictly in line with procedures set out in the provisions of the Convention—namely, hold consultations with the Syrian side.

The Organisation's work on the Syrian "chemical dossier" ought to revert to a normal, technical route. The dialogue between the Technical Secretariat and the Syrian authorities is ongoing, but the results have been lacking. We find the unwillingness to listen to and accept the arguments of Damascus to be a manifestation of the anti-Syrian sentiment that currently dominates the Organisation's administrative bodies. The Technical Secretariat and the Syrians are equal partners insofar as responsibility for progress in this area is concerned. We firmly believe that it would be possible to achieve with political resolve and the non-interference of external forces.

As a responsible participant of the Convention, Russia unconditionally condemns the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere, and under any circumstances. We are prepared to work together with other States Parties and cooperate closely with the goal of eliminating military "chemistry" from the world and preventing the reproduction of this type of weapon of mass destruction. But this task must be tackled exclusively within the legal field, without any attempts to replace the standards of international law with problematic rules.

Countering chemical terrorism should be an important aspect of the Organisation's work. There are two specialised groups at the OPCW that provide the States Parties at their meetings a spate of presentations that emphasise the experience of other international bodies. What, then, is the role of the OPCW? The numerous incidents of chemical terrorism in the Middle East—including in Syria—is no secret to anyone. But for some reason, this problem is never on the agenda. In its time, Russia initiated discussions within the Organisation about measures that need to be taken by the international community in order to stop the threat of the use of chemical weapons by terrorist groups. Clearly, the Convention's abilities here are not enough. At the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, we proposed considering the preparation of an additional mechanism in this area—an International Convention on the Suppression of Acts of Chemical and Biological Terrorism. But our initiative to start a discussion on this issue here in The Hague was unfortunately rejected. As a result, the OPCW, as before, remains a non-participant in this serious issue.

We are not satisfied with the work being done in other important areas, either. How many times has the need for States Parties to fulfil their obligations under Article XI of the Convention been addressed? But no serious steps have been taken in that area. The responsibility for that absolutely lies with those industrially developed countries that, in spite of the requirements of the Convention, disrupt the economic and technical development of other States Parties in chemical activities that are not prohibited by the Convention. Moreover, things often go as far as economic sanctions.

Today, there remains only one State Party that possesses declared stockpiles of chemical weapons. We would like to urge the United States not to delay the destruction of its chemical arsenals and to complete the process, following Russia's example, ahead of the stated deadline and in strict compliance with the provisions of the Convention.

In conclusion, we would like to once again emphasise the following: the Organisation needs improvements, and it needs an impetus for positive development. An attempt to look towards the future was made at the Fourth Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties to Review the Operation of the Chemical Weapons Convention in 2018. Everyone clearly remembers that at the time, the approval of the final document that set out recommendations for the various areas of the Organisation's work in the future was blocked.

Despite this altogether sad situation, we are not losing hope that this very contradictory stage in the activity of the Organisation will soon come to an end, and we will be able to return to carrying out the true tasks and objectives of the Convention, with a clear understanding of the responsibility for creating a safer, more predictable world.

We request that this statement be circulated as an official document of the Ninety-Fourth Session of the Executive Council and published on the Organisation's internal and external websites.

- - - 0 - - -