



# Security Council

Seventy-eighth year

**9317**<sup>th</sup> meeting

Monday, 8 May 2023, 10 a.m.

New York

*Provisional*

*President:* Mrs. Baeriswyl . . . . . (Switzerland)

*Members:*

Albania . . . . .	Mr. Spasse
Brazil . . . . .	Mr. Sénéchal de Goffredo
China . . . . .	Mr. Sun Zhiqiang
Ecuador . . . . .	Mr. Fiallo Karolys
France . . . . .	Mrs. Jaraud-Darnault
Gabon . . . . .	Ms. Bongo
Ghana . . . . .	Mr. Agyeman
Japan . . . . .	Mr. Hamamoto
Malta . . . . .	Mr. Camilleri
Mozambique . . . . .	Mr. Afonso
Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Polyanskiy
United Arab Emirates . . . . .	Ms. Shaheen
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Phipps
United States of America . . . . .	Mr. Wood

## Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Letter dated 26 April 2023 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2023/297)

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*The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.*

### **Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

### **The situation in the Middle East**

#### **Letter dated 26 April 2023 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2023/297)**

**The President** (*spoke in French*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Syrian Arab Republic and Türkiye to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mrs. Izumi Nakamitsu, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2023/297, which contains the text of a letter dated 26 April 2023 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council.

I give the floor to Mrs. Nakamitsu.

**Mrs. Nakamitsu:** I thank Council members for the opportunity to brief them on the implementation of Security Council resolution 2118 (2013), on the elimination of the chemical weapons programme of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Since the Council's previous consideration of this matter (see S/PV.9275), and consistent with established practice, the Office for Disarmament Affairs has been in regular contact with its counterparts at the Technical Secretariat of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) on activities related to resolution 2118 (2013). The OPCW Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) has continued its efforts to clarify all outstanding issues regarding the initial declaration and subsequent declarations of the Syrian Arab Republic. Unfortunately, all efforts by the OPCW Technical Secretariat to organize the next round of consultations between the DAT and the Syrian National Authority continue to be unsuccessful.

As Council members were previously informed, the OPCW Technical Secretariat has provided the Syrian Arab Republic with the list of pending declarations and other documents requested by the DAT since 2019 that could assist in resolving the current 20 outstanding issues. In May 2022, the OPCW Technical Secretariat proposed to address the declaration-related issues through exchange of correspondence. I have been advised that, although the Syrian Arab Republic agreed to that proposal, the OPCW Technical Secretariat has still not yet received from the Syrian Arab Republic any declarations or other documents requested. That includes the complete declaration of activities at the Scientific Studies and Research Centre (SSRC) and the declaration of quantities of nerve agents produced at one chemical weapons production facility that was declared by the Syrian Arab Republic as never having been used to produce chemical weapons.

Owing to this situation, and in a further attempt to implement its mandate, the OPCW Technical Secretariat proposed to deploy a reduced team comprised of several members of the DAT to the Syrian Arab Republic to conduct limited in-country activities. The first such deployment took place from 17 to 22 January, and the second took place from 12 to 19 April. The outcome of the first deployment was reported to the States parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) in March, and the outcomes of the second deployment will be reported to the OPCW Executive Council in due course.

The OPCW Technical Secretariat remains fully committed to implementing its mandate aimed at verifying the fulfilment of the Syrian Arab Republic's declaration obligations under the Convention, decisions by OPCW policymaking organs and resolution 2118 (2013). However, as has been previously emphasized, full cooperation by the Syrian Arab Republic with the OPCW Technical Secretariat is essential to closing all outstanding issues. Considering the identified gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies that remain unresolved, at this time the OPCW Technical Secretariat assesses that the declaration submitted by the Syrian Arab Republic still cannot be considered accurate and complete in accordance with the Chemical Weapons Convention.

With regard to the inspections of the Barzah and Jamrayah facilities of the SSRC, I have been advised that the OPCW Technical Secretariat continues to plan the next round of inspections, to be held in 2023. I regret to inform the Council 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 detection of a Schedule 2 chemical at the Barzah facilities of the SSRC in November 2018.

Regarding the unauthorized movement of the two cylinders related to the chemical weapons incident that took place in Douma on 7 April 2018, in which those cylinders were allegedly destroyed in an attack on a chemical weapons production facility, the OPCW Technical Secretariat is still awaiting information related to the unauthorized movement of those cylinders. I again call upon the Syrian Arab Republic to respond with urgency to all of the OPCW Technical Secretariat's requests.

With regard to the invitation extended by the OPCW Director-General to the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Syrian Arab Republic for an in-person meeting, I note that the OPCW Technical Secretariat stands ready to engage further on an agreed agenda for the meeting through the agreed channel.

It is my understanding that the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) continues to provide support to the OPCW mission in Syria, in accordance with the Tripartite Agreement concluded between the OPCW, UNOPS and the Syrian Arab Republic. The current extension of that agreement remains in force until and including 30 June.

I have been advised that the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) continues to study all available information related to allegations of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic. In that context, I understand that the FFM is currently preparing upcoming deployments and will report to the Executive Council on the results of its work in due course. The Investigation and Identification Team also continues its investigations into incidents in which the FFM has determined that chemical weapons were used or likely used in the Syrian Arab Republic and will issue further reports in due course.

In conclusion, I would like to call the attention of the Council to the fifth Review Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention, which will take place next week. The Conference is an important opportunity for States parties to renew and strengthen their commitments to the CWC and the norm against the use of chemical weapons. As I have previously urged the Council, we must make every effort

to ensure the continued resilience of the taboo against those horrific weapons. The use of chemical weapons anywhere, by anyone, under any circumstances, is a grave violation of international law. There can be no justification for their use. Those responsible for such attacks must be identified and held accountable for the sake of the victims and as a deterrent to future chemical warfare. It is my sincere hope that Council members will unite on the issue and show leadership, not only in the Council, but also at the upcoming Review Conference, in upholding the hard-won gains of the Chemical Weapons Convention and demonstrating that impunity for the use of chemical weapons will not be tolerated. The United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs stands ready to provide whatever support and assistance it can.

**The President** (*spoke in French*): I thank Mrs. Nakamitsu for her briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

**Mr. Polyanskiy** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): As in previous meetings to discuss the Syrian chemical dossier in past reporting periods, we are compelled to note that there has been no significant progress on the ground that would require the attention of the Security Council. We are meeting today only to enable a number of Western delegations to repeat the same hackneyed anti-Syrian talking points, which are clearly intended for domestic consumption. It goes without saying that this entire performance seriously undermines the Council's effectiveness and credibility.

We are likely to hear once again from our Western colleagues the unfounded allegations that there has been no progress on closing the Syrian chemical weapons dossier, ostensibly owing to Damascus' lack of cooperation. They do not shy away from saying that, despite its biased approach, even the Technical Secretariat of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) acknowledges, including in its recent report (see S/2023/297), that Damascus continues to cooperate with the organization. We note that the twenty-fifth round of consultations between Damascus and the Declaration Assessment Team since the initial declaration has yet to take place because the Technical Secretariat is not interested in such a scenario. The Technical Secretariat continues to find an increasing number of reasons to delay the consultations so that Western countries can continue

to present the situation as evidence of the Syrian authorities' supposed unwillingness to cooperate, all of which is nothing other than a scene from the West's monthly staged performance in this Chamber. The understudy in this play is none other than Fernando Arias, Director-General of the OPCW, who has not only never visited Syria, but also stated his unwillingness to do so under the contrived and legally unsubstantiated grounds that Syria's rights within the organization have been suspended. In other words, Mr. Arias simply is unwilling to discharge his duty, while opting to toe the line of the Western countries.

Given the fact that we have nevertheless met to play our role in this pointless spectacle, which is diverting the resources of the Security Council, we would like to reiterate that we do not acknowledge the legitimacy of the punitive decision of the Conference of the States Parties — which was brazenly pushed through by Western delegations in violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention and the principle of consensus — or the work or outcomes of the illegitimate Investigation and Identification Team (IIT), established in violation of the principle of consensus and article XV of the CWC. The only thing worth mentioning today is the Arria Formula meeting that we held on 24 March, in which we heard new convincing evidence of the methodology used by both the Fact-Finding Mission and the IIT in direct violation of the CWC's principles of investigation, especially in terms of the principle of the chain of custody. Of course, our Western colleagues are deaf and blind when it suits them and contend that such evidence is Russian and Syrian propaganda. After all, their only goal is to cover up the Technical Secretariat's fabrications and its manipulation of the report on the staged incident in Douma in 2018. That, of course, is also part of today's performance.

Against the backdrop of the trends and circumstances we have described, we harbour little hope that, during one of the organization's major events — the fifth Review Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention — to be held from 15 to 19 May in The Hague, the discussions will not be politicized. It is unlikely that the collective West, confident in its impunity, will eschew further violations of the basic principles of the work of the organization and the provisions of the Convention itself. The truth is that the OPCW is rapidly losing its authority, owing to the efforts of Washington and its satellites, and its role has been reduced to that of an

obedient tool in the hands of the West in its crusade against Russia and its allies. We are convinced that, regardless of the Western outrage in The Hague, the Security Council should not be turned into a platform for promoting the anti-Syrian narrative of the United States and its allies. Repeatedly discussing the carbon-copy reports of the Director-General every month, especially in his absence, is pointless. We are taking the floor today only because there was no meeting on this topic in April, and we abstained from taking the floor in March (see S/PV.9275). Once again, we call for a reasonable schedule for discussions on this subject in the Council — one meeting per quarter on the Syrian chemical weapons dossier would be more than enough.

**Mr. Wood** (United States of America): I thank High Representative Nakamitsu for her briefing this morning and for the steadfast work of the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) on this important issue.

As we have heard from the High Representative and seen in numerous reports of the OPCW, the Al-Assad regime has not met its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention and resolution 2118 (2013). Specifically, the regime has yet to offer a full accounting of its chemical weapons and is not cooperating fully nor being transparent with the OPCW. Full consultations with the OPCW Declaration Assessment Team remain necessary because Syria will not fully disclose and verifiably eliminate its chemical weapons programme. It has only been through the diligent and thorough efforts of the Declaration Assessment Team that the Al-Assad regime has been forced to reveal on seven separate occasions more and more of its chemical weapons programme. Those revelations filled in glaring gaps in Syria's still woefully inaccurate declaration. But the regime also continues to thwart the Declaration Assessment Team, refusing to allow the lead technical expert to deploy to its territory and preventing full consultations from taking place for more than two years now. The Declaration Assessment Team is currently able to carry out only limited in-country activities, decidedly undermining the effectiveness of its visits.

Russia's shameless shielding of Syria's defiant behaviour enables the Al-Assad regime and leaves the Syrian people facing the prospect of further chemical weapons attacks. Rather than calling for the full implementation of resolution 2118 (2013), which Russia originally supported, Russia has chosen to attack



the credibility and professionalism of the OPCW, undermining the Charter of the United Nations in the process.

The United States condemns the Al-Assad regime in the strongest possible terms for its repeated use of chemical weapons against Syrian civilians, including in Douma on 7 April 2018, as described in the report of the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) released in January. We commend the IIT for its professionalism, rigour and thoroughness in its investigation and preparation of that report. We expect that the IIT's future reports will identify the perpetrators of other chemical weapons attacks that occurred in Syria.

We once again call on the Syrian regime to amend its Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) declarations to make them accurate and complete, as required by the CWC, and provide immediate and unfettered access to OPCW staff, as required under resolution 2118 (2013).

**Mr. Agyeman** (Ghana): I have the honour to deliver this joint statement on behalf of the three African members of the Security Council — Gabon, Mozambique and my own country, Ghana (A3).

We thank the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Mrs. Izumi Nakamitsu, for her briefing and welcome the participation in today's meeting of the representatives of the Syrian Arab Republic, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Türkiye.

We take note of the content of the 115th monthly report of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) (see S/2023/297), as well as the submission of the 113th monthly report of the Syrian Arab Republic. The A3 reiterates its commitment to the established norms against the use of chemical weapons and continues to support all efforts to eliminate their production, storage or use. To that end, we acknowledge the report on the limited in-country activities, conducted by the reduced team deployed to the Syrian Arab Republic in January, comprising several members of the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT), and await the report of the most recent visit in April.

Notwithstanding the recent developments, the A3 remains concerned about the slow pace of progress concerning efforts to eliminate the Syrian Arab Republic's chemical weapons programme. We maintain that substantial progress could be made with the full

cooperation of the Syrian National Authority and its compliance with all aspects of the decision of the Executive Council of 27 September 2013.

We encourage the Syrian Arab Republic to continue its efforts to fulfil its obligations in line with resolution 2118 (2013) and the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) to help in resolving protracted issues, including the matter of the detection of a Schedule 2.B.04 chemical at the Barzah facilities in November 2018; the declaration of all chemical weapons and their production facilities in the country's possession and the organization of the 25th round of consultations with the DAT. We further urge the focal points of the Syrian authorities and the DAT alike to expedite arrangements for the proposed high-level meeting and reach a decision on the agenda for that meeting, which would foster the needed momentum for the conclusive resolution of the outstanding issues and, ultimately, speed up the process.

The use of chemical weapons does not only pose serious health risks but also presents a grave threat to international peace and security. The international community therefore has a responsibility to protect humankind from those weapons by promoting adherence to international instruments that prohibit their use by anyone, anywhere and under any circumstances.

In conclusion, we reaffirm our support for resolution 2118 (2013) and wish to underscore the need for a definite closure of the issues pertaining to the Syrian chemical weapons programme. We therefore urge all stakeholders to show full commitment to the resolution of all outstanding issues in order to avoid lingering doubts related to the production and possible use of chemical weapons in Syria.

**Mr. Phipps** (United Kingdom): As always, I would like to begin by thanking High Representative Izumi Nakamitsu for her briefing. As Mrs. Nakamitsu said, at next week's fifth Review Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention, States parties will take stock of the Convention's implementation and set future priorities. They will also reaffirm the importance of the Convention.

The Convention and wider non-proliferation can hold only if its rules are upheld, and rule-breakers are held to account. The Al-Assad regime has repeatedly breached its obligations under the Convention and resolution 2118 (2013). There is undeniable and direct evidence of the Syrian State murdering its own civilians

using chemical weapons on at least nine occasions. The Council has failed to hold the regime to account for the use of those abhorrent weapons. That failure is primarily due to the actions of one permanent member, which has itself used chemical weapons in recent years, including in my country in 2018. This is not a show, and this statement is not groundless.

The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) has put exceptional amounts of resources into trying to help Syria resolve the outstanding issues regarding its initial declaration. Those issues are not academic and include the whereabouts of hundreds of tons of chemical weapons agents. As we heard again from Mrs. Nakamitsu, access for OPCW staff remains restricted, and despite worrisome findings by the Declaration Assessment Team, the denials of Syria and Russia continue.

We commend the OPCW team's continued efforts and underscore that the fundamental obligations that Syria has as a State party to the Convention must be upheld. It must give up all its chemical weapons, stop banned activity and comply in full with the OPCW. Until Syria has made meaningful progress on those issues, its chemical weapons programme is an ongoing threat to international peace and security that the Council needs to address. We must collectively send a clear message about our shared commitment to the ban on chemical weapons, and we need to defend and uphold the international consensus that those weapons should never be used.

**Mr. Fiallo Karolys** (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Izumi Nakamitsu, for her briefing. I also thank the Director-General of the Organization the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) for his most recent report (see S/2023/297).

That report once again reflects the lack of progress on the issue of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic. Ecuador reiterates its request for the prompt and diligent submission of the statements and documents requested by the Declaration Assessment Team, and for immediate and unrestricted access to the OPCW Technical Secretariat staff to all sites and locations under investigation.

We deplore the position taken by Syria to exclude the lead technical expert from the Declaration Assessment Team as a precondition for the holding of the 25th round of consultations, thereby impeding the proper conduct

of the consultations. We urge the Syrian authorities to establish effective and unrestricted cooperation in fulfilment of their responsibilities under, inter alia, the Chemical Weapons Convention and relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2118 (2013).

The Council must have access to the findings of the activities of the reduced teams that have been deployed to carry out activities in the country. Ecuador reiterates its support for the work of the OPCW, as well as for the integrity, impartiality, objectivity and independence of its technical teams. We reiterate the importance of accountability as the best mechanism for deterrence.

Lastly, recalling the preamble of the Convention, in which States resolved to eliminate weapons of mass destruction of all kinds, Ecuador is opposed to the production and stockpiling of chemical weapons and condemns in the strongest terms the use of chemical weapons and toxic substances by anyone, against anyone, anywhere and under any circumstances.

**Mr. Sun Zhiqiang** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank High Representative Izumi Nakamitsu for her briefing.

China's position on chemical weapons-related issues is consistent and unequivocal. China firmly opposes the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere and under any circumstances and looks forward to a world without any chemical weapons as soon as possible. We urge those countries that possess chemical weapons to destroy them all as soon as possible.

Dialogue and consultations are the only way to resolve the Syrian chemical weapons issue. The Syrian Government has made clear remarks on many occasions that it opposes the use of chemical weapons and that it is ready to work with the OPCW to resolve outstanding issues. Recently, despite its domestic security challenges, the Syrian Government hosted a small team of members of the Declaration Assessment Team in order for them to conduct activities in the country. This is a welcome development.

The international community should consider Syria's efforts objectively, recognize its willingness to cooperate and the outcomes achieved thus far, and create an enabling environment for dialogue and cooperation between Syria and the OPCW Technical Secretariat. We encourage both parties, on the basis of mutual respect and equal cooperation, to maintain communication on issues such as the twenty-fifth round

of technical consultations and the meeting between the OPCW Director-General and the Syrian Minister for Foreign Affairs.

With regard to the fact that the Syrian Government and the Technical Secretariat have different answers to certain questions, we maintain that science and facts should be respected and that an objective and fair approach should be upheld. Both parties should continue with thorough discussions and strive to move in the same direction so as to jointly resolve outstanding issues as soon as possible.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate that the Council should reduce the frequency of its consideration of the Syrian issue, or consider combining the various tracks of the dossier. That would enable us to take a holistic approach to the Syrian issue and make the Council's work more efficient.

**Mr. Hamamoto (Japan):** First, I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Nakamitsu for her briefing.

I would like to begin by reiterating Japan's principled position on this chemical weapons file: any use of chemical weapons, anywhere, at any time, by anyone and under any circumstances is unacceptable, and those responsible for their use must be held accountable. For that purpose, we strongly support the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and reaffirm the importance of the ongoing work of the Fact-Finding Mission and the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) in establishing the truth regarding the alleged instances of chemical weapons use and identifying the perpetrators. We extend our full support to their impartial, independent and professional work, and we welcome the third IIT report on the Douma incident.

Syria's chemical weapons use remains a threat to international peace and security. We maintain deep concerns regarding the continuing discrepancies, gaps and inconsistencies in Syria's initial and subsequent declarations. We welcome the continued efforts undertaken by the OPCW and its Technical Secretariat to address all outstanding issues, including the second round of limited in-country activities conducted by the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) in Syria. We look forward to hearing the outcome of the visit during our next meeting.

However, we regret to hear that the recent efforts to hold the next round of consultations between the DAT and the Syrian National Authority have unfortunately been unsuccessful, as previous efforts were. Syria should take the necessary steps to facilitate the holding of those consultations and refrain from making further excuses to impede the entry of the DAT's lead technical expert to its territory. We once again urge Syria to comply with its obligations under the CWC and the relevant Security Council resolutions and to immediately declare and completely eliminate its chemical weapons programme.

As highlighted by Under-Secretary-General Nakamitsu, the fifth Review Conference of the States Parties to the CWC is scheduled to take place later this month. We strongly urge all States parties to actively and constructively participate in that Review Conference discussion. Now is not the time to diminish the authority of the CWC or the OPCW. Instead, now is the time for the Council to stand united and demonstrate our strong support for their invaluable contributions to the global efforts towards the elimination of the threat of chemical weapons use.

**Mr. Sénéchal de Goffredo (Brazil):** At the outset, let me state that my delegation welcomes the decision by the League of Arab States to reinstate Syria as a member of that organization.

I would like to thank High Representative Nakamitsu for her briefing today.

Let me begin by reiterating that Brazil considers the use or threat of use of any weapon of mass destruction incompatible with international humanitarian law. We condemn the use of chemical weapons anywhere, by anyone and under any circumstances. The use of such weapons poses a threat to international peace and security and violates the Chemical Weapons Convention.

We have closely studied the most recent report by the Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), dated 26 April (see S/2023/297). While the report provides us with little new information, we are nevertheless encouraged by the fact that the reduced team that visited Syria early this year delivered its report to OPCW States parties at the end of last month. That visit and its subsequent report are important steps in rebuilding confidence between Syria and the OPCW. We hope that those steps can serve as a basis for further dialogue on a mutually acceptable arrangement for the return of the full Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) to Syria in the near future.

The report on the limited in-country activities undertaken by the reduced DAT gives us hope that constructive thinking is still possible on the file. We call on Syria and the OPCW to build on that experience by exploring new formats for high-level political dialogue, as well as for in-country activities by the technical teams. We believe that this would increase confidence on both sides. At the same time, closer cooperation is needed between the OPCW and the United Nations, since the ultimate instance for the attribution of responsibility is the Security Council.

In conclusion, cooperation between Syria and the OPCW and between Syria and the United Nations remains the best hope for closing the so-called Syrian file and for preventing and deterring any future use of those abominable weapons.

**Mrs. Jaraud-Darnault** (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Mrs. Nakamitsu for her briefing.

As we all know, we are here because the Syrian regime has used weapons of mass destruction against its own population. Independent investigations by the United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) have demonstrated that nine times. Nevertheless, almost a decade after the adoption of resolution 2118 (2013), the regime has still not shed light on its stockpiles. We know, however, that not all of them have been destroyed. The lack of progress is frustrating, and the responsibility in that regard lies entirely with the Syrian regime.

It is imperative that the Syrian regime allow OPCW personnel to deploy to Syria, as per its mandate. The restrictions that have again been imposed by Syria on the deployment of the initial Declaration Assessment Team are unacceptable. Limited deployments of OPCW teams to Syria, as the one that took place last month, is not a viable alternative. Syria must stop obstructing the work of the Technical Secretariat and comply with its international obligations.

Despite the obstacles it faces, the OPCW Technical Secretariat continues its investigative work with tenacity, independence and professionalism. I wish to once again commend it.

There must be no impunity for war criminals. The fight against impunity is the foundation of the effectiveness and credibility of the prohibition regime. France will continue to work with its partners to that end.

**Mr. Spasse** (Albania): I thank Mrs. Nakamitsu for her presentation.

Ten years after the adoption of resolution 2118 (2013), we still have not seen any evidence of Syria having destroyed its chemical weapons programme. That is troubling and deplorable.

We commend the work of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in shedding light on allegations of chemical weapons use in Syria, including through the work of the Fact-Finding Mission and the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT).

Albania welcomes the publication of the third report of the IIT, which concludes that the Syrian Arab Air Force used chemical weapons on 7 April 2018 in Douma, killing 43 people. The report further confirms Syria's systematic non-compliance with its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention and resolution 2118 (2013). This is the ninth instance of the use of chemical weapons independently attributed to the Syrian regime by the United Nations and OPCW mechanisms.

The use of chemical weapons constitutes a flagrant violation of international law, a war crime and a crime against humanity. We condemn in the strongest terms the Syrian regime's repeated use of these atrocious weapons, in flagrant violation of international obligations. Those responsible for the use of these weapons must be brought to justice.

The most recent consultation between the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) and Syria took place in February 2021. The organization of the twenty-fifth round of consultations has still not taken place. Syria continues to put unreasonable conditions on the consultations and asks to exclude the main technical expert from the DAT, contrary to its obligations under the Convention and resolution 2118 (2013). We regret this persistent obstruction by the Syrian regime. Nevertheless, the Technical Secretariat offered to deploy reduced DAT teams to carry out limited activities in Syria. We await with interest the conclusions of their visit in April.

Many important questions regarding Syria's chemical-weapons programme remain unanswered. The two most recent reports of the OPCW Technical Secretariat confirmed clearly persistent gaps and discrepancies in the initial Syrian declaration. The current 20 outstanding questions must have an answer. Syria must declare the full extent of its chemical-weapons



programme and return to full compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention and resolution 2118 (2013). We look forward to the meeting between the OPCW Director-General and the Syrian Minister for Foreign Affairs. With equal interest, we await the results of the ninth round of inspections of the Barzah and Jamrayah facilities, conducted in September 2022.

Finally, we deplore the non-cooperative approach of the Syrian regime with the OPCW Technical Secretariat. Syria is playing for time in the hope that the issue of the use of chemical weapons will fade from the Council's agenda. We should not let that happen.

**Mr. Camilleri** (Malta): I also thank High Representative Nakamitsu for her informative briefing today.

On nine occasions, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) or joint United Nations-OPCW investigations have concluded that Syria has used chemical weapons against its own people — nine instances in which the armed forces of a State attacked Syrian civilians with weapons of mass destruction. Such acts are completely indefensible. Perpetrators cannot and must not go unpunished.

Most recently, the third report of the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) concluded that there are reasonable grounds to believe that the Syrian Arab Air Force were the perpetrators of the Douma chemical-weapons attack, which killed 43 people and injured dozens more. It has been made clear that the methodology used in the findings of the report was drafted in keeping with the best practices of international fact-finding bodies and commissions of investigation, as well as applicable OPCW procedures.

We reiterate our full confidence and support for the independent, unbiased and expert work of the OPCW and its Technical Secretariat. They play a vital role in the global prohibition of chemical weapons and in the complete elimination of all chemical weapons in Syria.

Time and time again, we see an unfortunate pattern of Syria's continued failure to fully cooperate with the OPCW. Syrian authorities failed to grant access to the sites of the Douma incident, despite the country's obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention and resolution 2118 (2013). The pending declarations and other documents requested by the Declaration

Assessment Team (DAT) since 2019 have not yet been provided by the Syrian Arab Republic, and the declaration submitted is still considered inaccurate and incomplete.

Malta regrets that Syria continues to impose limitations on the composition of the DAT team to be deployed, which has prevented the twenty-fifth round of consultations. The full DAT team should be able to deploy as soon as possible for that purpose. In the meantime, Malta looks forward to the outcome of the DAT's limited in-country activities conducted in April.

We hope that an agenda for the proposed meeting between the Director-General and Foreign Minister Mekdad can be agreed as soon as possible. Malta strongly encourages the renewed extension of the tripartite agreement between the OPCW, the United Nations Office for Project Services and Syria. The agreement is due to expire soon, on 30 June.

It is only through Syria's meaningful cooperation with the OPCW that we can ensure that Syria's chemical-weapons programme has been completely and verifiably eliminated. Syria must provide the necessary assurances on its chemical weapons programme, in accordance with the Chemical Weapons Convention. We reiterate and stress that there can be no justification for the use of these abhorrent weapons. Those who used them must be held accountable. We once again underline our full support for the universalization of the prohibition of chemical weapons.

We must uphold our own decisions, uphold the norm against chemical weapons and hold Syria to its obligations under resolution 2118 (2013) and the Chemical Weapons Convention.

**Ms. Shaheen** (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mrs. Izumi Nakamitsu for her briefing.

Before I touch upon the topic of today's meeting, I would like to welcome the decision taken by the Arab States yesterday to readmit Syria to its seat at the League of Arab States. That decision was taken based on our shared belief in the importance of having an effective Arab role that contributes to resolving the region's crises and restoring security and stability to it. We hope that this step will pave the way for a solution to the Syrian crisis through a clear Arab approach and that the Syrian people will finally see a glimpse of hope after years of war.

In the context of our meeting today, the United Arab Emirates confirms the following points.

First, engaging in a meaningful dialogue between the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and Syria is necessary for any tangible progress on this dossier. We stress here the need to work in the spirit of the principles upon which the OPCW was founded, in their technical nature. These include consensus and non-politicization.

Regarding the visit of the OPCW's reduced team to Syria last month, we stress the importance of moving forward with holding comprehensive consultations between the two parties as soon as possible. We do not see any reason to not do so. In that context, we welcome Syria's proposal to hold a round of high-level consultations in order to develop a new plan of action to resolve issues related to the Syrian chemical file.

Secondly, the threat of chemical terrorism remains an important issue that must be given sufficient attention, especially while Da'esh continues to launch its terrorist attacks that pose serious threats to the security and stability of Syria. We must be vigilant because the Da'esh organization will not hesitate to use any means or weapons to achieve its goals and regain control, as it did before.

Thirdly, there is a need to examine the effectiveness of the Council's recurring meetings on the Syrian chemical file, especially in light of the absence of any developments that warrant holding a meeting. Instead, meetings on this issue could be held every three months, and as needed.

In conclusion, the United Arab Emirates stresses once again the importance of making progress on the chemical-weapons file in Syria. We look forward to witnessing tangible progress on all tracks related to the Syrian file in the upcoming period.

**The President** (*spoke in French*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Switzerland.

First of all, I would like to thank Mrs. Nakamitsu, the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, for her briefing.

Switzerland welcomes the fact that for the second time this year, some members of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Declaration Assessment Team were able to visit Syria, from 12 to

19 April. Their reduced team conducted limited activities, including site visits and technical exchanges with the authorities. We look forward to receiving the report of the visit. We hope that it will lead to the restoration of full cooperation between Syria and the OPCW. To that end, we reiterate that Syria must provide immediate and unhindered access to OPCW personnel, including the right to inspect all sites.

Syria's obstruction of visits by the full Declaration Assessment Team is a serious breach of the obligations outlined in resolution 2118 (2013), which was unanimously adopted by the Security Council. In addition, 20 points in Syria's initial statement remain outstanding. Syria must provide the necessary answers to the OPCW Technical Secretariat. Switzerland would like to once again reaffirm its full confidence in the OPCW and all of its teams, including the Investigation and Identification Team, whose integrity and professionalism are unquestionable.

We welcome the fifth Review Conference of the Chemical Weapons Convention, to be convened in The Hague from 15 to 19 May. It will be an opportunity to strengthen the role of the Convention in combating the use and proliferation of those weapons of mass destruction and in disarmament. The adoption by consensus of a joint declaration would send a clear message in that direction.

Switzerland condemns the repeated use of chemical weapons in Syria, as reported by the Fact-Finding Mission and the Investigation and Identification Team, which has severely affected civilians, including many children. The use of chemical weapons is prohibited and in armed conflict can constitute a war crime. For the sake of our collective security, it is essential to combat impunity for such crimes by identifying, prosecuting and punishing those responsible. In that regard, we welcome the formal cooperation between the OPCW and the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011. It is an important step towards implementing resolution 2118 (2013), as well as ensuring compliance with relevant international law.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

**Mr. Sabbagh** (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Madam President, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of May, and I would also like to thank your predecessor, the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation, for his successful leadership of the work of the Council in the past month.

At the outset, I want to renew my country's condemnation of the use of chemical weapons at any time, anywhere, by anyone and in any circumstances. We reiterate our rejection of the false accusations and lies made about my country in that regard by some States. I would also like to reaffirm Syria's full and transparent cooperation with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), and its fulfilment of all its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). In 2013, the Syrian Arab Republic made a strategic decision to accede to the CWC. We demonstrated our commitment to implementing it immediately, even before it entered into force in Syria, by providing detailed information about our chemical programme and then destroying the related stockpiles and production facilities in record time, which is attested to by the relevant reports of the OPCW. I would like to point to some aspects relating to the issue under discussion.

First, on 15 March and 15 April, respectively, the Syrian National Authority submitted its 112th and 113th monthly reports related to the implementation of the decision of the OPCW Executive Council dated 15 November 2013.

Secondly, with regard to the work of the Declaration Assessment Team, I would first like to clarify that Syria's initial declaration was submitted within a short period of time, with limited experience, which was why the Team came to help Syria — with its consent — to make its initial declaration consistent with the provisions of the CWC. The Declaration Assessment Team therefore cannot and should not be considered an inspection team in any way. A reduced number of members of the Team visited Syria twice this year, first from 17 to 22 January and subsequently from 12 to 19 April. The Syrian National Authority provided all the cooperation and facilitation necessary to ensure the success of their work. During both visits, several consultations were also held with the Syrian National Authority, discussing many aspects related to unresolved issues in the declaration. We facilitated visits to some sites, the collection of samples and interviews of witnesses.

During both visits, none of the activities carried out by that team — which, by the way, is the same Declaration Assessment Team, without just the one expert that the OPCW Technical Secretariat insists on sending — differed in any way from all the previous 24 rounds of consultations. That therefore raises the question as to why the OPCW Technical Secretariat has so far refused to fully hold the twenty-fifth round of consultations despite the fact that the reduced team has carried out all the activities assigned to the Declaration Assessment Team. Or does it aim only to provide pretexts for others to falsely accuse Syria of non-cooperation?

Thirdly, regarding the inspection activities at the facility of the Scientific Studies and Research Centre, in March the OPCW inspection team issued its report of its ninth round of inspections, conducted in September 2022. The report refers to Syria's cooperation, as well as the inspection team's ability to implement the objectives entrusted to it, and it does not mention any activities that run counter to the Convention. In that regard, it is regrettable that neither the most recent monthly report of the Director-General (see S/2023/297) nor the briefing delivered today by Mrs. Nakamitsu referred to the results of the report of that ninth round or the report of the eighth round before it. That means that the Technical Secretariat is not addressing those results when they reflect Syria's full cooperation with its teams. Does that not raise a serious question about the impartiality and balance that should characterize the Director-General's reports?

Fourthly, Syria welcomed the holding of high-level consultations between the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Syrian Arab Republic, the Chairman of the Syrian National Authority and the Director-General of the OPCW, and earnestly looks forward to their holding as soon as possible, after an agreement on the agenda is reached.

Fifthly, although the Syrian Arab Republic has continuously underscored the need for the Fact-Finding Mission to reform its working methods, address its serious defects and produce professional and impartial reports, it has continued to cooperate with that Mission, has received its teams and has provided it with all possible forms of facilitation to make its mission a success. Syria continues to wait for the Fact-Finding Mission to issue its reports on the incidents on which Syria has reported.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that the Chemical Weapons Convention, like other international conventions, was drafted on the basis of the delicate balance between the rights and obligations of the States parties. Therefore, certain countries' claim that Syria is in non-compliance with the CWC at a time when they have worked to deprive Syria of its rights and privileges as a State party to the Convention runs counter to the spirit of the balance weighing the rights and obligations enshrined in the Convention, in addition to the biased and unprofessional way in which the Technical Secretariat is handling the Syria dossier by focusing on obligations and ignoring rights. My country continues to work openly with the OPCW, despite the Technical Secretariat's departure from the technical and unbiased foundation established by the CWC. The responsibility for correcting that departure lies with the States parties to the Convention, so that the Technical Secretariat can correct its course and revert to being an impartial tool for the implementation of the CWC.

**The President** (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

**Mr. Iravani** (Islamic Republic of Iran): At the outset, I would like to congratulate Switzerland on its first presidency of the Security Council. I would also like to thank Russia for its successful work as President of the Council for the month of April. We welcome the presence of Mrs. Nakamitsu at this briefing.

As the main victim of chemical weapons, the Islamic Republic of Iran strongly condemns the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere and under any circumstances. The use of chemical weapons is a serious violation of international law and a crime against humanity. It constitutes a threat to international peace and security. Our people will never forget the role that some Western countries played in assisting the Saddam regime in the systematic use of chemical weapons against the Iranian people during the war Iraq imposed on Iran. Some Western countries either remained silent or were complicit in the commission of such atrocities. Because of their harmful actions and double standards, the Security Council was unable to carry out its duties, based on the Charter of the United Nations, to take effective action to hold the perpetrators accountable for such atrocious crimes. It is disturbing to see such double standards and detrimental practices continue to persist, as evidenced by the politicization of the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Organization

for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) for short-sighted political gain. Such an approach not only risks creating divisions among Member States but also undermines the credibility and legitimacy of the disarmament machinery.

The Syrian Arab Republic remains committed to upholding its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention. In line with that commitment, the Syrian Government has continued its constructive cooperation with the OPCW. Syria has submitted its monthly reports to the OPCW Director-General, outlining its activities related to the destruction of chemical weapons and their production facilities. Moreover, a reduced Declaration Assessment Team visited Syria twice, once in January and once again in April, during which time the Syrian National Authority provided the necessary facilitation to ensure the success of the work of the Team. Furthermore, consultations took place between the two sides, and many aspects related to some of the outstanding issues were discussed, facilitating visits to sites, the collection of samples and interviews of witnesses.

The use of chemical weapons by terrorist organizations poses a grave threat, about which the Syrian Arab Republic has repeatedly expressed its concern. Such a threat should not be ignored or underestimated and calls for condemnation, as well as an immediate response to prevent such weapons from falling into terrorists' hands.

We support constructive dialogue between Syria and the OPCW at the highest level, within a specific time frame to resolve outstanding issues and finally close the file. However, any investigation must be impartial, professional, credible and objective and must fully comply with the Convention's requirements and procedures. Furthermore, it is crucial that the OPCW remain a neutral and objective international body, guided solely by scientific and technical considerations in its efforts to prevent the use of chemical weapons and promote the goals of the Convention. We call on all Member States to uphold the principles of the Convention and work together to ensure the impartiality, professionalism and integrity of the OPCW.

Lastly, despite the absence of new developments, continuing to convene monthly meetings on the Syrian chemical file, at which some members repeat previous claims against the Syrian Arab Republic, is not constructive. Using a political approach and double



standards on this file can only jeopardize the process of addressing unresolved issues and will only serve to detract from the technical nature of the discussion at hand.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Türkiye.

**Mrs. Özgür** (Türkiye): We congratulate Switzerland on its first presidency of the Security Council. We would also like to thank High Representative Nakamitsu for her briefing.

Syria became a State party to the Chemical Weapons Convention in 2013. Like every other State party, the Syrian regime has the following obligations under the Convention, as well as under resolution 2118 (2013).

First, it must never, under any circumstances, develop, produce, transfer or use chemical weapons. The reports of the investigative bodies mandated by the United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), however, have established the Syrian regime's responsibility in nine chemical weapons attacks in Syria, both before and after the date on which the regime became a State party to the Convention.

Secondly, it must fully cooperate with OPCW and provide assistance to its Technical Secretariat. The 115th monthly report of the OPCW Director-General and the briefing by the High Representative this morning show that it has not been possible to hold the next round of consultations between the OPCW Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) and the Syrian National Authority for more than two years, owing to, inter alia, the regime's objection to the composition of the DAT delegation.

Thirdly, it must submit timely, accurate and complete declarations related to the chemical weapons and chemical weapons facilities on its territory. In the most recent monthly report of the Director-General (see S/2023/297), we see once again that pending declarations and other documents requested by the Declaration Assessment Team since 2019 have not been submitted by the regime, which has also yet to provide sufficient technical information or explanations that would enable the Technical Secretariat to close the issue related to the detection of a schedule 2 chemical at the Barzah facilities. Neither has the Technical Secretariat received a response to its inquiries regarding the unauthorized movement of two cylinders related to the 2018 Douma attack. As a result of identified gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies that remain unresolved, the OPCW still cannot consider the declaration submitted by the regime accurate and complete. We call on the Syrian regime to fulfil its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention and resolution 2118 (2013).

The use of chemical weapons anywhere constitutes a threat to international peace and security. It is a grave violation of international law and unacceptable in any circumstances. We strongly condemn the repeated use of chemical weapons in Syria. We will continue to support the efforts of the United Nations and the OPCW to ensure accountability for those grave violations. Ending impunity and holding perpetrators to account is indispensable to achieving lasting peace in Syria.

**The President** (*spoke in French*): There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

*The meeting rose at 11.10 a.m.*