



# Security Council

Seventy-eighth year

**9393**<sup>rd</sup> meeting

Tuesday, 8 August 2023, 10 a.m.

New York

*Provisional*

*President:* Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield . . . . . (United States of America)

*Members:*

Albania . . . . .	Mr. Stastoli
Brazil . . . . .	Mr. França Danese
China . . . . .	Mrs. Gui Dan
Ecuador . . . . .	Mrs. Sánchez Izquierdo
France . . . . .	Mrs. Jaraud-Darnault
Gabon . . . . .	Mr. Biang
Ghana . . . . .	Mr. Agyeman
Japan . . . . .	Mr. Tamaura
Malta . . . . .	Mr. Camilleri
Mozambique . . . . .	Mr. Afonso
Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Glukhov
Switzerland . . . . .	Mr. Hauri
United Arab Emirates . . . . .	Ms. Alshamsi
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Phipps

## Agenda

### The situation in the Middle East

Letter dated 6 July 2023 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2023/508)

Letter dated 27 July 2023 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2023/558)

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.*

### **Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

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

**Letter dated 6 July 2023 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2023/508)**

**Letter dated 27 July 2023 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2023/558)**

**The President:** 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 the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Adedeji Ebo, Deputy to the High Representative of the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs; and Mr. Mohamad Katoub, Project Manager, IMPACT — Civil Society Research and Development.

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/2023/508, which contains a letter dated 6 July 2023 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council, and document S/2023/558, which contains a letter dated 27 July 2023 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council.

I give the floor to Mr. Ebo.

**Mr. Ebo:** I thank Council members for the opportunity to brief them once again on the implementation of Security Council resolution 2118 (2013) on the elimination of the chemical weapons programme of the Syrian Arab Republic. I am providing this briefing on behalf of the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Mrs. Izumi Nakamitsu, who is currently away from Headquarters.

Since the most recent consideration of this matter by the Council, and consistent with established practice, the Office for Disarmament Affairs has been in regular contact with its counterparts in the Organization for the

Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Technical Secretariat on activities related to resolution 2118 (2013).

Since the Council's previous meeting on this matter (see S/PV.9372), the OPCW Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) has continued its efforts to clarify all outstanding issues regarding the initial declaration and subsequent declarations submitted by the Syrian Arab Republic.

As previously reported, the last round of consultations between the DAT and the Syrian National Authority took place in February 2021. Since then, all efforts to organize the next — that is, the twenty-fifth — round of consultations have been unsuccessful. I have been advised that although the Syrian Arab Republic agreed to the OPCW Technical Secretariat's May 2022 proposal to address the declaration-related issues through exchange of correspondence, the Technical Secretariat has yet to receive from the Syrian Arab Republic any declarations or other documents requested. That includes a complete declaration of activities at the Scientific Studies and Research Centre (SSRC) and a declaration of quantities of nerve agents produced at one chemical-weapon production facility that the Syrian Arab Republic had declared as never having been used to produce chemical weapons. Due to that situation, and in a further attempt to implement its mandate, the OPCW Technical Secretariat has deployed a reduced team, consisting 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 from 12 to 19 April. The outcomes of the deployments were reported to the States parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention in March and July 2023, respectively.

I have been informed that in March, following a prior attempt by the OPCW Technical Secretariat in November 2022, the Syrian Arab Republic proposed meeting with the Technical Secretariat in Damascus or Beirut to develop a new work plan to resolve all issues related to the Syrian chemical-weapon dossier. As a result, a delegation from the Technical Secretariat met with representatives of the Syrian Arab Republic in Beirut on 22 and 23 June. I understand that the meeting had a fully open agenda, and the following points were addressed.

First, a six-month extension to the tripartite agreement between the OPCW, the Syrian Arab

Republic and the United Nations Office for Project Services was agreed, extending its duration up to and including 31 December.

Secondly, the Syrian Arab Republic committed to presenting proposals for better implementing its obligations.

Thirdly, the OPCW Technical Secretariat and the Syrian Arab Republic discussed the conduct of the twenty-fifth round of consultations as the optimal means of achieving outcomes related to the Syrian chemical-weapon dossier.

Fourthly, the OPCW Technical Secretariat emphasized that its priority was a resumption of rounds of consultations that would include all experts designated by the Technical Secretariat. Regarding the resumption of consultations, I understand that the matter was to be referred to the head of the Syrian National Authority and that the OPCW Technical Secretariat is awaiting that decision in order to proceed with planning for the next round.

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 the OPCW policymaking organs and resolution 2118 (2013). However, as has been previously emphasized, the full cooperation of the Syrian Arab Republic with the OPCW Technical Secretariat is essential in closing all outstanding issues. Considering the gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies that have been identified and 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 as required under 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 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. In addition, I have been informed that during the ninth round of inspections at the Barzah facility of the SSRC in September 2022, the inspection team observed a number of boxes containing a chemical of a dual-use nature stored

in large quantities at the facility's chemical storage warehouse. Following the inspection, the OPCW Technical Secretariat engaged the Syrian National Authority on the matter and requested information that would allow it to assess that all activities conducted in the facility are for purposes not prohibited under the Convention. I understand that the Technical Secretariat is still awaiting that information.

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

I have been advised that the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission continues to study all available information related to allegations of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic. As the Council was previously informed, on 28 June the OPCW Technical Secretariat issued a report of the Fact-Finding Mission regarding incidents of alleged use of toxic chemicals as a weapon in Kharbit Massasneh on 7 July and 4 August 2017. The report concluded that the information obtained and analysed in line with the Fact-Finding Mission's mandate did not provide reasonable grounds for the Mission to determine that toxic chemicals were used as a weapon in the reported incidents. I understand that the Mission 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 is also continuing its investigations into incidents in which the Fact-Finding Mission has determined that chemical weapons were used or likely used in the Syrian Arab Republic and will issue further reports in due course.

As the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs has emphasized on many occasions, any use of chemical weapons is unacceptable. The absence of accountability for that use is a threat to international peace and security and a danger to us all. In closing, I would like to urge the members of the Council to unite on the issue and show leadership in demonstrating that impunity in 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:** I thank Mr. Ebo for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Katoub.

**Mr. Katoub:** I would like to thank the presidency of the Council for giving the floor to civil-society organizations and witnesses of atrocities.

Twelve days from today, the world will mark the tenth anniversary of the largest chemical massacre that the twenty-first century has witnessed, a massacre that took place in eastern Ghouta on 21 August 2013, killing more than 1,200 people and injuring more than 10,000. I witnessed the Ghouta massacre. Through my work as a member of a medical team in Ghouta and later, after I fled Syria, of other civil-society organizations, I have been engaged in the medical response to chemical attacks and the documentation of the use of chemical weapons in Syria. It represents unfortunate experience that I, as a dentist, would not have had to go through had there been any measures of accountability.

On the morning of that day, I walked out of my office to a nearby school that we had turned into a decontamination centre. I cannot forget the scene in the school halls. Bodies were scattered around, turning a sacred space for children into a vast funeral home. The towns of Ghouta were then under siege by the Al-Assad regime and engulfed in a war where the use of chemical weapons was one of many war crimes occurring simultaneously. We did not have protective gear, or the time and space for each patient who needed care after being suffocated by the chemical weapons, but at the time we had hope that if we exposed those crimes we could prevent future attacks in Syria and elsewhere in the world.

A few days after the chemical attack, the investigators of the United Nations Mission to Investigate Allegations of the Use of Chemical Weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic arrived at the locations of the attack in Ghouta. They were already in Syria investigating other attacks. They collected samples and interviewed witnesses. Soon after, the Security Council adopted resolution 2118 (2013), on the use of chemical weapons in Syria. With the resolution's adoption, and Syria agreeing to abide by the Chemical Weapons Convention — a treaty signed by almost every State in the world — we should have had absolute compliance. Instead, more than 170 chemical attacks have since been reported in Syria. In the past 10 years, more than 1,500 people have been killed and 15,000 injured by the chemical weapons of the Al-Assad regime.

That was not a message to us, the victims, witnesses and civil-society organizations. It was not a message to us, the people of Ghouta and other towns in Syria attacked by chemical weapons. We were gassed and killed, but we did not write the Chemical Weapons Convention or the Charter of the United Nations. The Member States did. It was therefore a clear message from the Syrian regime that it disregards international institutions and treaties. The response by the international community, including the Council, was limited to further investigations, with no serious action taken towards accountability.

It is very hard to do nothing while watching rescue and medical teams risking their lives to save one more life or enter contaminated areas without protective gear to retrieve one more piece of evidence. On 4 April 2017, one of the civil defence volunteers was pregnant. She lost her baby while rescuing other people after the chemical attack in Khan Shaykhun. Ten days earlier, Dr. Ali Darwish, who worked at the hospital in Al-Lataminah, died when the hospital was attacked with a chemical bomb dropped by the Al-Assad air forces. Knowing all of that and doing nothing is very hard. Hiding behind a Russian veto that might block an attempt to refer the situation to the International Criminal Court does not make it any easier (see S/PV.7180). And no — sanctions are not enough and do not provide the accountability that victims want.

The Council has received heaps of reports from the Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) established by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the United Nations and the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) confirming the responsibility of the Syrian regime for the chemical attacks. Because of impunity, the Syrian regime put an end to an international norm that had long been agreed on.

The risk of the use of chemical weapons remains. The same regime that used them with impunity is still in power and the same Russian allies are still supporting Syria's war criminals. And other dictators worldwide may get the wrong message if they see that the paths to accountability are blocked. In response to the heaps of evidence collected and investigations conducted, denial has been the Syrian regime's strategy. It has employed a number of tactics, such as manipulating evidence, presenting false witnesses and intimidating survivors, witnesses and their families. It has pressured investigators — whether individuals or institutions — and invested resources in running media



disinformation campaigns. Those tactics are being used in other countries as well. Through our research, we have found that some of the same social media accounts have been used in denying war crimes in both Syria and Ukraine, which comes as no surprise.

Among the survivors of the Douma attack on 7 April 2018 is a family of four that I know. They were displaced to northern Syria after the attack, as were many other people from Douma. They also witnessed the earthquake in February this year that hit northern Syria and southern Türkiye. The father told me once that the pain of the chemical attack itself, the suffering due to being forcibly displaced from his hometown, the panic in the wake of the earthquake, the memories of his two children in the shelter with their neighbours and facing death and the unknown — all of that pales in comparison to the pain he feels when people ask him if it is true that Al-Assad did indeed use chemical weapons. Denial has made us more determined to make our voices heard. It made witnesses sharpen their memories so that they could recall every detail when they testified. It made investigators stricter in their methodologies so that their reports would be more solid before any court.

In Syria we are lucky — or perhaps unlucky — to have had all those investigative bodies with all those acronyms. It is hard to even remember all of them — the Independent International Commission of Inquiry, the JIM, the IIT, the Fact-Finding Mission, the Declaration Assessment Team, and so forth. Syrian civil society, the families of victims and the rescue and medical teams cooperated with all of them. Those investigative bodies did their jobs, as did the Council. When Russia vetoed the renewal of the mandate of the JIM (see S/PV.8073), there was a way to keep those investigations going. The IIT was established in an unprecedented vote at the OPCW. And the Council can still do its job. There are similar ways to bypass a potential veto of a referral of all perpetrators to the International Criminal Court. There are ways to stop doing nothing. Doing nothing is undermining the brave work of those investigators, the international institutions and treaties that Member States created, the work of the OPCW that the United Nations built and protected around a norm that was said to be universal. It is undermining the Council, which is supposed to be responsible for peace globally.

Ten years have passed since the Ghouta massacre and the adoption of resolution 2118 (2013), which should make everyone think about the message that the Council is sending to the Syrian regime, and the message that

the OPCW States members are sending not only to the Syrian regime, but to other perpetrators — and to the investigators who have been working so tirelessly. But we will continue the fight to explore concrete options to reinstate the norm of the prohibition of chemical weapons by finding ways to hold all perpetrators to account, alongside States that believe that the exceptional use of chemical weapons requires exceptional measures to say no — no to impunity.

**The President:** I thank Mr. Katoub for his briefing.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the United States of America.

Let me start by thanking Mr. Ebo and the entire team at the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) for their leadership on this critical issue. I also deeply admire Mr. Katoub's courage and his advocacy on behalf of the Syrian people.

As Mr. Katoub detailed, 10 years ago, early in the morning of 21 August, the Al-Assad regime released sarin on Syrian civilians in the Ghouta district of Damascus. That brutal attack killed more than 1,400 people. Sadly, many of them were children. The world saw toddlers struggling to breathe and besieged first responders desperately trying to decontaminate their neighbours. Piles of bodies lined the streets. The attack was a sickening milestone in the regime's campaign of terror against the people of Syria. Less than a month later, and after broad international condemnation, the Al-Assad regime submitted its instrument of accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), and the United States and Russia adopted a framework for the complete destruction of the Syrian chemical-weapon programme. That was followed shortly thereafter by the Security Council's adoption of resolution 2118 (2013).

We now know that the regime never planned to comply with the CWC and that it wilfully hid chemical weapons from the OPCW. In fact, since acceding to the CWC in September 2013, the United Nations and the OPCW's investigative mechanisms confirmed that Syria used chemical weapons against its own people in nine subsequent attacks. The Al-Assad regime has repeatedly lied to the international community and to the investigators examining the incidents. Syria has never provided a full accounting of its chemical-weapons programme, and despite its obligations under resolution 2118 (2013) to fully cooperate with the OPCW, it has repeatedly obstructed the OPCW's work. For all those reasons, Al-Assad's chemical-weapon attacks demand

the Council's continued attention. The Council cannot allow Al-Assad and his henchmen, who have killed thousands of people, to get away with those atrocities. To do so would endanger all of us. It would mean turning a blind eye to regimes that choose to manufacture, stockpile and use chemical weapons.

We have heard some of our colleagues say that our monthly meetings on this issue feel repetitive. And I have to say that I regret that two permanent members of the Council have indicated that they will not speak today on a matter of such gravity. But the Al-Assad regime is betting that the Council will simply move on. It is hoping that we will change the subject. We must not succumb to fatigue — or worse, indifference. The Al-Assad regime used weapons of mass destruction against its own people. We will not move on, and the regime will not escape accountability. Syria has a duty to implement its obligations under the CWC in resolution 2118 (2013). We urge Damascus to stop delaying, obfuscating and spreading disinformation. We continue to press for action in the OPCW and here in the Council, so that the OPCW can make progress towards fulfilling its investigative mandate, which has shed light on the regime's numerous chemical-weapon attacks.

Let me be clear. The United States remains committed to pursuing justice for the victims of Ghouta and other chemical-weapon attacks. We must never forget their victims and survivors. Their loved ones deserve justice. The Syrian people deserve justice. The Council must come together to demand justice and, at long last, real steps to end Syria's chemical-weapon threat.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

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

**Mrs. Jaraud-Darnault** (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Mr. Ebo and Mr. Katoub for their briefings.

Independent investigations by the United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) have documented and demonstrated the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime. Today we are meeting here once again because the Syrian regime used weapons of mass destruction against its own population. Independent investigations by the United Nations and the OPCW have proved that on nine occasions. Nearly a decade after the adoption of resolution 2118 (2013), the regime still refuses to

provide information on the status of its stockpiles, which we know were not completely destroyed. But the regime has a responsibility to respect international law.

The Syrian regime has continued its deliberate policy of obstruction. It is imperative for the regime to allow the deployment of OPCW personnel to Syria so that it can fulfil its mandate. As indicated in the latest monthly report from the OPCW Director-General (see S/2023/558), the OPCW is still awaiting a response from the regime in order to organize the twenty-fifth round of consultations between the initial Declaration Assessment Team and the regime. Let me remind the Council that those consultations have been pending since April 2021, more than two years now. In addition, the restrictions that Syria has imposed on the deployment of the initial Declaration Assessment Team are unacceptable, and the limited deployment of OPCW teams in Syria is unacceptable. Syria must stop obstructing the work of the OPCW Technical Secretariat and comply with its international obligations. Despite the obstacles, the Technical Secretariat has continued its investigative work with tenacity, independence and professionalism, and I want to commend it for that once again.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that the use of chemical weapons by the regime against its own population constitutes war crimes and crimes against humanity. We cannot accept impunity, for the sake of the Syrian people, the region and the international community as a whole. Combating impunity is the foundation for ensuring the effectiveness and credibility of the regime prohibiting chemical weapons. Failing to implement it now is tantamount to accepting the possibility of new violations of the CWC, new crimes and new threats to international order and security. That is why France will continue to work determinedly and relentlessly with its partners to combat impunity for the use of chemical weapons.

**Mr. Tamaura** (Japan): I would first like to thank Mr. Ebo, Deputy to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, and Mr. Katoub for their insightful briefings. We reiterate our full support for the impartial, independent and professional work of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and its Technical Secretariat, including its Fact-Finding Mission and Investigation and Identification Team.

It is regrettable that we have not seen concrete progress on this file, and the monthly report by the OPCW Director General once again confirmed that

the declaration submitted by the Syrian Arab Republic still cannot be considered accurate and complete. Japan urges Syria to engage in good faith with the OPCW Technical Secretariat and provide all requested documents to solve the outstanding issues related to the initial and subsequent declarations submitted by Syria.

We regret that all efforts to hold the next round of consultations between the Declaration Assessment Team and the Syrian National Authority have been unsuccessful. In that regard, we express our gratitude to the OPCW Technical Secretariat for providing updates on their meeting with Syrian representatives in Beirut on 22 and 23 June 2023. As emphasized by the Technical Secretariat during the meeting, priority should be given to the resumption of rounds of consultations, incorporating all experts designated by the Technical Secretariat.

The use of chemical weapons by Syria remains a threat to international peace and security. The Security Council cannot remain silent and allow impunity for those responsible for the use of chemical weapons against their own people. Preventing the recurrence of the use of chemical weapons in Syria must continue to be the Council's priority. We call upon all Council members to join us in urging the Syrian Government to fully comply with its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention and Security Council resolution 2118 (2013) and eliminate its entire chemical weapons programme.

**Ms. Alshamsi** (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I thank Mr. Adedeji Ebo, Deputy to the High Representative of the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, for his briefing. We also listened to the briefing delivered by Mr. Mohamad Katoub.

Before I deliver my statement, I would like to reiterate what the United Arab Emirates has previously recalled, namely, the need to use the time and resources of the Council wisely, including by convening meetings that have a purpose and that are not limited to restating positions that are already widely known to all, in the absence of any developments. The Council should therefore reassess the effectiveness of convening monthly meetings on chemical weapons in Syria. An agreement should be reached to hold such meetings once every three months unless significant developments warrant otherwise.

Regarding the subject of our discussion today, I would like to reiterate my country's position on this file.

First, my country reaffirms the importance of maintaining constructive dialogue between the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and Syria. In that regard, we welcome the meeting held between the two sides in Beirut last June to discuss the twenty-fifth round of consultations and other outstanding issues that are pertinent to making progress on this file.

Secondly, we reiterate the need to devote sufficient attention to the threat of chemical terrorism, especially as Da'esh continues to carry out terrorist attacks and has shown no hesitation in utilizing all available means to achieve its objectives. The report issued last month by the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team on Da'esh and Al-Qaida confirmed that Da'esh continues to use north-eastern Syria to launch attacks, rebuild its capacities and networks, recruit fighters and release its members from prison, posing a serious threat not only to the security and stability of Syria, but to the entire region.

In conclusion, the United Arab Emirates emphasizes once again the importance of making progress on Syria's chemical weapons file and on all other files related to resolving the Syrian crisis.

**Mr. Hauri** (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I would first like to thank the Deputy to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Mr. Ebo, for his presentation. I also take note of Mr. Katoub's briefing.

Switzerland reiterates its full confidence in the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) as the principal guardian of the Chemical Weapons Convention. The integrity and professionalism of the OPCW and all its missions are beyond doubt.

Switzerland regrets that the efforts of the OPCW Technical Secretariat to organize the next round of consultations between the Declaration Assessment Team and the Syrian National Authority have remained unsuccessful since April 2021. The obstacles posed by Syria to the restoration of full cooperation with the OPCW and to the immediate and unlimited deployment of designated personnel on its territory constitute a serious lack of compliance with the obligations contained in Security Council resolution 2118 (2013).

In that context, Switzerland welcomes the discussion of the resumption of bilateral consultations between the Technical Secretariat and Syria, which took place in Beirut on 22 and 23 June. We hope that that is a first step towards full cooperation between the

Syrian authorities and the Technical Secretariat. To that end, we encourage Syria to comply with its obligations under Security Council resolution 2118 (2013) and to provide answers to the 20 points still to be clarified in its initial declaration.

Finally, we are encouraged by the six-month renewal of the tripartite agreement between Syria, the OPCW Technical Secretariat and the United Nations Office for Project Services. The renewal should facilitate operations on the ground in accordance with the OPCW's working modalities, which were clearly reaffirmed in resolution 2118 (2013).

By unanimously adopting that resolution almost 10 years ago, the Council reaffirmed that the proliferation of chemical weapons and of their means of delivery constitutes a threat to international peace and security. Switzerland recalls that the use of chemical weapons by any actor is prohibited in all circumstances and constitutes a war crime in armed conflicts. It calls on all parties to respect their obligations under the Convention and international humanitarian law. Finally, Switzerland fully supports the 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, which ensures that such crimes are documented and do not go unpunished.

**Mr. França Danese** (Brazil): I thank the Deputy to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Mr. Adedeji Ebo, and Mr. Mohamad Katoub for their briefings today.

Once again, we have read the most recent report of the Director General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) (S/2023/558) and found little new information that would merit the attention of the Council. We reiterate that the frequency of these meetings could be adjusted in order to allow the Security Council to devote itself more intensely to other, more urgent matters.

Nevertheless, we must say that we are encouraged by the recent contacts between members of the OPCW Technical Secretariat and representatives of the Syrian Arab Republic in Beirut on 22 and 23 June 2023. We welcome Syria's commitments to implementing its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention, and we hope these initial contacts may permit the resumption of consultations at a higher level in the near

future. Dialogue, closer cooperation between Syria and the OPCW and continued and full compliance by Syria remain our best hopes for closing this file.

Having said that, Brazil reaffirms that chemical weapons are utterly incompatible with international humanitarian law and must therefore have no place in the practices and doctrines of today's world. The production, storage and use of such weapons violate international agreements and pose serious threats to international peace and security. Brazil strongly condemns the development, storage and use of chemical weapons anywhere, by anyone, under any circumstances. Incidents must be addressed with transparency and be subject to thorough and impartial investigation, in accordance with the Chemical Weapons Convention and international law.

**Mr. Phipps** (United Kingdom): Let me begin by thanking Deputy to the High Representative Mr. Ebo for his briefing and in particular Mr. Katoub not only for his briefing today but also for his work responding to the abhorrent chemical attack in Ghouta in 2013 and for his ongoing efforts to fight impunity on behalf of all of the victims of chemical weapons.

Mr. Katoub's briefing is a reminder of why it is imperative that we remain focused on this agenda. In the decades since Syria acceded to the Chemical Weapons Convention, internationally mandated organizations have confirmed that the Syrian regime used chemical weapons against its people on at least nine occasions. As Mr. Katoub said, there have been many more attacks. The human impact of those attacks has been horrific. The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism and OPCW's reports have provided undeniable and direct evidence of the Syrian State's shocking track record of murdering its own civilians using chemical weapons. We collectively owe it to the thousands of victims to pursue justice and to hold those responsible for those crimes to account.

Syria continues to fail to meet its obligations under resolution 2118 (2013) and the Chemical Weapons Convention. Despite concerted efforts by the OPCW to get to the truth, Syria's chemical weapons stockpile declaration is still not accurate. Syria has failed to declare and destroy all of its chemical weapons, which continue to pose a serious threat to regional, as well as international, security.

We therefore once again reiterate our calls on the Syrian regime to fulfil its obligations under the Convention and under resolution 2118 (2013) and to



engage meaningfully with the OPCW. It must declare and destroy all aspects of its chemical weapons programme. It is our responsibility to uphold and defend the integrity of the Chemical Weapons Convention, the non-proliferation architecture and the global consensus that those weapons must never be used.

**Mrs. Sánchez Izquierdo** (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation is grateful for the briefings by the Deputy to the High Representative of the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, Mr. Adedeji Ebo, and Mr. Mohamad Katoub.

The monthly report presented by the Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) (see S/2023/558) reflects once again the limited progress on the issue of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic due to the failure to respond to and facilitate the work of the technical teams. Despite all the constraints faced, we appreciate the efforts of OPCW and its technical teams in their continued efforts to achieve the complete and verifiable elimination of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic.

The meeting held at the end of June between the OPCW Technical Secretariat and the Syrian authorities reflected the possibility that exists to develop a new work plan to resolve all outstanding issues with regard to the Syrian chemical weapons dossier. Ecuador calls upon the Syrian Arab Republic to keep that mechanism of dialogue open, in addition to cooperating and addressing the proposals made during the most recent meeting, which will be a step forward towards fulfilling its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention, the decisions of the OPCW governing bodies and the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, including resolution 2118 (2013).

We also stress the importance of extending until 31 December the tripartite agreement among the United Nations Office for Project Services, the Syrian Arab Republic and the OPCW, which facilitates the activities recommended by the OPCW Technical Secretariat in the country. We therefore urge Syria to allow access to the required information, as that is the only way we can ensure that those acts do not go unpunished.

Lastly, my delegation takes note of the findings presented by the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission on the alleged incidents in Kharbit Massasneh in the Syrian Arab Republic on 7 July and 4 August 2017. The findings demonstrate the impartial and professional work of the Fact-Finding Mission and the OPCW teams.

Ecuador once again expresses its solidarity with all victims of chemical weapons attacks. We reiterate our rejection of the production and stockpiling of those weapons and our categorical condemnation of their use by anyone, against any person, anywhere and under any circumstances.

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

We thank Director Adedeji Ebo for briefing us on the status of the implementation of the elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme. We welcome the participation of our colleagues the representatives of the Syrian Arab Republic, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Türkiye in this meeting.

We thank the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) for its 118th monthly report covering the period from 24 June to 23 July (see S/2023/558). Gabon, Ghana and Mozambique would like to reiterate their full support for the Organization's work as the main body responsible for ensuring the full implementation of the chemical weapons elimination programme in Syria.

The report provides a sober account of both progress made and continuing gaps that persist. On the one hand, we must acknowledge Syria's ongoing cooperation, including the recent six-month extension of the tripartite agreement facilitating the OPCW's activities. That reflects a shared commitment to see this process through.

It is in that sense that we welcome the conduct of limited in-country activities by a reduced team of the Declaration Assessment Team in Syria, as part of the OPCW Technical Secretariat's ongoing efforts to fulfil its mandate, leading to reports communicated to the States parties in March and July.

We have taken note of the submission of the 116th report by the Syrian Arab Republic on activities carried out on its territory related to the destruction of its chemical weapons, as well as its chemical weapons production facilities, as requested by the Executive Council. In addition, the A3 welcomes the meeting between the OPCW Technical Secretariat and representatives of the Syrian Arab Republic on 22 and 23 June in Beirut, which represents a positive step forward in the implementation of the chemical weapons destruction programme in Syria.

At the same time, serious issues remain unresolved. Syria has yet to provide sufficient information to enable the closure of all outstanding issues regarding its initial and subsequent declarations. Moreover, we encourage Syria to complete the measures requested by the Executive Council 90 days ago to redress the situation regarding the 2017 chemical weapon attacks. Those measures are essential to shedding full light on Syria's capabilities, so we call for enhanced cooperation between the OPCW Technical Secretariat and the Syrian National Authority.

The amendment to the agreement signed by the Syrian Government, the United Nations Office for Project Services and the OPCW, extending its duration until 31 December, which will facilitate the Technical Secretariat's mandated activities in the Syrian Arab Republic, concerning the complete elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme is likely to bring us closer to resolving the issue.

We are convinced that the Syrian Arab Republic's exchanges and collaboration with United Nations bodies will be useful in building confidence and providing the necessary impetus to advance the various aspects of the programme and encourage further cooperation.

However, the international community generally and the Council in particular must continue to be concerned about the potential re-emergence of chemical weapons and take the steps needed to accelerate action towards a world free of chemical weapons. The A3 remains committed to the norms established against the use of chemical weapons and supports all efforts aimed at eliminating their production, stockpiling or use. We reiterate our support for resolution 2118 (2013). Finally, we commend the commitment and efforts of the countries contributing to the OPCW's Trust Fund for Syria Missions. Such contributions help facilitate the work of the OPCW and make it possible for it to fully implement its mandate.

The A3 encourages the parties to engage in a constructive and continuing dialogue. The completion of the elimination of Syria's chemical-weapon programme is an important part of our common goal of international peace and security. We firmly believe that progress requires good faith on all sides. Only cooperation and consensus between the two sides can result in a just and definitive conclusion to the issue. We owe that to the Syrian people and to humankind as a whole. The

world is watching, and we must do everything in our power to address all issues that inhibit progress in the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013).

**Mr. Camilleri** (Malta): I thank Deputy High Representative Ebo and Mr. Katoub for their insightful briefings today.

I reiterate Malta's full support for the independent, unbiased and expert work of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and its Technical Secretariat. The OPCW, including through its Investigation and Identification Team, Fact-Finding Mission and Declaration Assessment Team (DAT), plays a pivotal role in the implementation of the global ban on chemical weapons and in ensuring the complete elimination of all chemical weapons in Syria.

Since our last meeting (see S/PV.9372), the OPCW has issued its most recent report (see S/2023/558). Once again, regrettably, the Technical Secretariat's efforts to organize a twenty-fifth round of consultations between the DAT and the Syrian National Authority have been unsuccessful. Among other things, that is due to the Syrian Arab Republic's refusal to issue a visa to the DAT's lead technical expert. The report also shows that no progress has been made on the 20 outstanding issues because the Syrian Arab Republic has not presented any of the documents requested by the Technical Secretariat. The declaration submitted by the Syrian Arab Republic therefore still cannot be considered accurate and complete, in accordance with the Convention, as well as with resolution 2118 (2013). While we take note of the six-month extension of the tripartite agreement and the deployment of two reduced DAT missions in January and April, we reaffirm that they are by no means sufficient substitutes for Syria's obligations. The lack of progress is deplorable, and Syria bears complete responsibility for it. We call on the Syrian Arab Republic to fully cooperate with the Technical Secretariat in accordance with resolution 2118 (2013). Malta is also deeply concerned about the repeated and baseless assertions aimed at undermining the credibility of the OPCW or casting doubt on its findings. The Council should address and rebut them decisively.

We reaffirm our full support to the OPCW Technical Secretariat and its technical teams, who carry out their mandate independently and impartially and in accordance with the highest international standards. Independent OPCW and joint United Nations-OPCW investigations have concluded that the Syrian regime has

used chemical weapons against its own people on nine occasions. That is unconscionable and deeply troubling. There can never be a justification for their use. In 2013, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2118 (2013), establishing that those responsible for the use of chemical weapons must be held accountable. Their use cannot and must not go unpunished. Malta firmly believes in the universalization of the global norm on the prohibition of chemical weapons, as mandated by the Chemical Weapons Convention.

To conclude, we call on Syria to cease obstructing the efforts of the OPCW and to comply with its international obligations. We reiterate our strong condemnation for the use of chemical weapons by any actor in any circumstances.

**Mr. Stastoli** (Albania): Allow me to thank Mr. Ebo for his briefing. I would also like to thank Mr. Katoub for his chilling account of his first-hand experience of the Al-Assad regime's use of chemical weapons against civilians.

The periodic reports of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) clearly demonstrate that Syria has no interest in cooperating. The clarification of the 20 questions currently outstanding regarding the initial and subsequent statements submitted by Syria remains unaddressed. Syria's systematic failure to comply with its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and resolution 2118 (2013) is deplorable, and Albania condemns that attitude. Due to Syria's refusal to cooperate, the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) has had to deploy a reduced mission to carry out limited activities in the country. We await the results of the samples collected that are currently being analysed by the OPCW's laboratories, but we would like to underline that the reduced DAT missions cannot replace the next round of consultations with Syria. Regarding the inspections of the Barzah and Jamrayah facilities, Syria persists in its failure to provide sufficient technical information or explanations that would enable those files to be closed. We nevertheless await the results of the inspections of those facilities.

We welcome the information from the most recent report of the Fact-Finding Mission (see S/2023/508), which dismisses the baseless allegations made by the Syrian regime about the alleged use of chemical weapons against the Syrian Arab Army on 7 July and 4 August 2017. The objective, rigorous and impartial establishment of the facts is essential to all of us. We

also welcome the work of the Office of the Investigation and Identification Team and its reports identifying the perpetrators of the use of chemicals as weapons in Syria. We fully endorse the findings of its third report that the Al-Assad regime was responsible for the deadly chemical-weapon attack on Douma on 7 April 2018. We condemn the repeated use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime. The people responsible for those acts must be brought to justice. The Security Council must impress on Syria that there is no alternative to full cooperation with the OPCW and the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013), adopted unanimously by the Council.

It is time for Syria to understand that it must fully declare and destroy its chemical-weapon programme in a transparent and verifiable manner. We commend the work of the OPCW, which verifies the facts with objectivity, impartiality, independence and professionalism. The OPCW calls on Syria to do what is stated in resolution 2118 (2013) and to implement its obligations under the CWC, which Syria itself has signed.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

**Mr. Dandy** (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Security Council discussed the chemical-weapon issue last month (see S/PV.9372). My delegation is surprised that the debate is being held again this month, given that there have been no new developments that would require it, other than providing a new opportunity for some States, which are familiar to all of us, to repeat their accusations against my country, thereby wasting the Security Council's time and resources.

My country has repeatedly condemned the use of chemical weapons anytime, anywhere, by anyone and under any circumstances. In that regard, I would like to mention that the United States of America continues its attempts to exploit the chemical weapons dossier to serve its hostile agenda against Syria. Available information indicates that the United States' military forces, which are based illegally in the Al-Tanf area, have provided elements of the so-called New Syrian Army, which is a terrorist one, with toxic chemical substances and trained them on their use in order to stage an incident involving the use of chemical weapons and accuse Syria for it.

The Syrian Arab Republic has consistently cooperated with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and has honoured

all of its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention. Relevant reports of the organization attest to that. In that regard, I note that the Syrian National Authority submitted its 116th monthly report regarding the activities that it carried out on its territories. It facilitated the visits of the Declaration Assessment Team to Damascus and was behind the initiative to hold a meeting in Beirut with the OPCW Technical Secretariat to discuss ways to enhance cooperation.

The extension of the tripartite agreement between Syria, the OPCW and the United Nations Office for Project Services was also discussed at that meeting with a view to facilitating the work of the organization and its teams in Syria. Contacts are ongoing in order to prepare a meeting between the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, the Head of the Syrian National Authority and the Director General of the OPCW in order to agree on an agenda for that meeting.

The Syrian Arab Republic regrets that some insist on ignoring its positive cooperation with the OPCW Technical Secretariat. We are also surprised that the Technical Secretariat continues its politicized approach, which is devoid of all objectivity and professionalism and allows some Western States to level accusations against Syria as they take advantage of the Technical Secretariat's biased reports to serve their agendas.

The Syrian Arab Republic reiterates its keenness to hold the twenty-fifth round of consultations with the Declaration Assessment Team as soon as possible. We call upon the OPCW Technical Secretariat to refrain from using certain procedural aspects as a pretext to postpone the convening of that round.

Syria believes that the reports issued by the Fact-Finding Mission constitute further proof that the OPCW is using its mandate in a politicized manner when carrying out investigations into reported incidents concerning the alleged use of chemical weapons on Syrian territories. The Fact-Finding Mission continues to employ unprofessional working methods, intelligence modalities and double standards in conducting its investigations. There have also been long delays in the completion of its investigations.

In conclusion, some States are trying feverishly to exploit the reports of the OPCW to serve their anti-Syria agendas, which risks undermining the credibility and impartiality of the organization. It is incumbent on all States to assume their responsibility and correct the course taken by the OPCW away from deception,

politicization and polarization so that the organization can effectively and credibly fulfil its mandate pursuant to the Chemical Weapons Convention.

What was said during this meeting regarding the alleged use of chemical weapons in Ghouta clearly and openly reflects the continued hostile approach of certain States against Syria. Such attempts are aimed at spreading false and misleading ideas. In that regard, the Syrian Government once again denies categorically those lies and allegations regarding the Syrian Arab Army's use of toxic chemical substances. It reaffirms that the Syrian army does not possess any kind of chemical weapons, nor has it ever used them in its fight against terrorists or anyone else, even in the most difficult conditions on the ground, because it does not possess any such substances.

Syria stresses that the armed terrorist groups and their sponsors are fabricating and staging incidences of the use of chemical weapons in order to establish pretexts for waging attacks and military aggressions against Syria and blackmail my country.

The United States of America and other Western States continue to hide behind slogans that demand justice for Syrians while shedding tears for their suffering. However, they are fooling no one with their blatant attempts to cover up for their devastating interventionist agendas and their hostile anti-Syria policies.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

**Mr. Ahmadi** (Islamic Republic of Iran): We welcome the presence of Mr. Ebo, Deputy to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, at today's meeting.

As a country that has experienced the horrors of chemical weapons first-hand, Iran strongly condemns the use of chemical weapons at any time, anywhere, by anyone and under any circumstances. The use of such weapons is a flagrant violation of international law, constituting a crime against humanity and posing a serious threat to global peace and security.

The Syrian Arab Republic remains steadfast in its commitment to fulfilling its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention. In alignment with that commitment, the Syrian Government has continued its constructive cooperation with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). We fully support constructive dialogue between



Syria and the OPCW, setting a specific time frame to address any remaining issues and bring the file to a final and conclusive closure. Such an approach will ensure transparency, accountability and a satisfactory resolution of all outstanding matters related to chemical weapons in Syria. In that context, we applaud Syria's determination to convene a high-level meeting between the Syrian Foreign Minister and the Director General of the OPCW.

To ensure a successful outcome, any investigation into chemical-weapon incidents must be conducted with utmost impartiality, professionalism, credibility and objectivity, strictly adhering to the Convention's requirements and procedures. The integrity and credibility of the OPCW as the most competent international authority rest on its ability to remain neutral and objective, guided solely by scientific and technical considerations. That principled approach is essential to effectively deter the use of chemical weapons and advance the objectives of the Convention. We therefore emphasize the full, effective and non-discriminatory implementation of the Convention. All Member States must fully adhere to the obligations outlined in the Convention to foster a safer world that is free from the threat of chemical weapons.

The repetition of statements made during today's meeting underscores the concern that the holding of regular and monthly sessions on this matter may be inefficient, given the lack of progress and significant developments. That approach could potentially waste valuable United Nations resources and the precious time of the Security Council. The report presented by the Deputy to the High Representative of the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs did not offer any new insights into the current situation. Because of that, some Council members have already put forth the suggestion that discussing this topic once per quarter, instead of monthly, could suffice. Iran supports that proposal, which is aimed at streamlining the Council's efforts in order to focus on matters that truly demand its immediate attention.

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

**Mr. Ekren (Türkiye):** We thank the Deputy to the High Representative of the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, Mr. Ebo, and Mr. Katoub for their briefings.

While all parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention must comply with their obligations, the 118th monthly report of the Director General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) once again demonstrates that the Syrian regime has yet to fulfil its obligations under the Convention and address all outstanding issues in relation to its initial and subsequent declarations. We commend the independence, impartiality and professionalism upheld by the OPCW's Technical Secretariat.

We applaud the efforts of the Technical Secretariat and the investigative bodies of the OPCW to clarify all outstanding issues of the initial and subsequent declarations of the Syrian regime, yet we remain concerned that the OPCW still cannot consider the regime's declaration accurate and complete owing to identified gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies that remain unresolved. The OPCW Technical Secretariat is still waiting for a response regarding the unauthorized movement of two cylinders used in the chemical attack in Douma in 2018.

We take note that a delegation from the OPCW Technical Secretariat met with a representative of the Syrian regime in Beirut on 22 and 23 June, during which they agreed on a six-month extension of the tripartite agreement. Although a resumption of the rounds of consultations between the Declaration Assessment Team and the Syrian regime was also discussed at the meeting, the OPCW Technical Secretariat has still not received a decision by the regime allowing it to proceed.

Türkiye strongly condemns the use of chemical weapons anywhere, by anyone and under any circumstances. We call on the Syrian regime to fully cooperate with the Technical Secretariat and the investigative bodies of the OPCW in accordance with the Convention and resolution 2118 (2013), including by resuming the rounds of consultations with the Declaration Assessment Team and by responding to the inquiries of the OPCW.

*The meeting rose at 11.20 a.m.*