



Security Council

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Letter dated 14 September 2020 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council

I have the honour to enclose herewith a copy of a briefing provided by Mrs. Izumi Nakamitsu, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, as well as the statements delivered by the representatives of China, the Dominican Republic, Estonia, France, Indonesia, the Niger, the Russian Federation, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, South Africa, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America and Viet Nam in connection with the video-conference on “The situation in the Middle East (Syria)”, convened on Thursday, 10 September 2020. A statement was also delivered by the representative of Turkey.

In accordance with the procedure set out in the letter dated 7 May 2020 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council (S/2020/372), which was agreed in the light of the extraordinary circumstances caused by the coronavirus disease pandemic, the enclosed briefings and statements will be issued as an official document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Abdou **Abarry**
President of the Security Council



Annex I**Statement by the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs,
Izumi Nakamitsu**

I thank you, Mr. President, for the opportunity to brief the Council on the implementation of Security Council resolution 2118 (2013), on the elimination of the chemical weapons programme of the Syrian Arab Republic. I hope that today's format will allow for a substantive debate on this very important international security issue.

As is established practice, the Office for Disarmament Affairs has maintained regular contact over the last month with counterparts at the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) on its activities related to this matter.

As I have previously informed the Security Council, all scheduled deployments and missions of the OPCW Technical Secretariat, including missions to take place in the Syrian Arab Republic, have been postponed until further notice owing to the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Nonetheless, the Technical Secretariat has continued with its mandated activities related to the elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme and its engagement with the Syrian Arab Republic in that regard. The OPCW Technical Secretariat will continue to closely monitor the situation and will keep States parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) duly informed of any developments.

The OPCW Declaration Assessment Team is continuing its efforts to clarify all outstanding issues regarding the Syrian Arab Republic's initial declaration to the OPCW. I have been advised that the OPCW Technical Secretariat received a response from the Syrian Arab Republic to the letter sent by the OPCW Director-General to the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Syrian Arab Republic dated 21 April 2020. That response submitted by the Syrian Arab Republic is being translated and will be reviewed and analysed by OPCW Technical Secretariat experts. The Technical Secretariat will inform the Executive Council of any developments in due course.

At the technical level, the engagement between the OPCW Secretariat and the Syrian National Authority continued, including through a video-teleconference held on 20 July 2020 followed by a note verbale from the Syrian Government dated 27 July 2020. I take this opportunity to once again stress that until these outstanding issues are closed, the international community cannot have full confidence that the Syrian Arab Republic's chemical weapons programme has been eliminated.

I have been advised that the OPCW Technical Secretariat still plans to conduct two rounds of inspections of the Barzah and Jamrayah facilities of the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Centre (SSRC) in 2020. However, the undertaking of those inspections will be subject to the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on OPCW activities.

I understand that the Syrian Arab Republic has not yet provided sufficient technical information or explanations that would enable the OPCW Technical Secretariat to close the issue related to the finding of a Schedule 2 chemical detected at the Barzah facilities of the SSRC. The OPCW Technical Secretariat will continue to engage with the Syrian authorities and will inform the OPCW Executive Council of any progress in due course.

The OPCW fact-finding mission remains in the process of studying all available information related to allegations of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic and continues its engagement with the Syrian Government and other States parties to the CWC with regard to a variety of incidents. As I have previously

informed Council members, further deployments of the mission will be subject to the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on OPCW activities.

Following its first report, issued on 8 April 2020, the Investigation and Identification Team is continuing its investigations into incidents in which the Team has determined that chemical weapons were used or likely used in the Syrian Arab Republic and will issue further reports in due course.

I have been advised that the OPCW Technical Secretariat has yet to receive a response from the Syrian Arab Republic to the letter sent to the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Syrian Arab Republic by the OPCW Director-General on 20 July 2020, outlining the obligations of the Syrian Arab Republic under OPCW Executive Council decision EC-94/DEC.2, entitled “Addressing the Possession and Use of Chemical Weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic” (see A/74/959). As conveyed by the Director-General in the aforementioned letter, the OPCW Technical Secretariat is ready to assist the Syrian Government in the fulfilment of those obligations within the required period of 90 days.

I take this opportunity to reiterate that the use of chemical weapons is unacceptable. The requirement for those responsible to be identified and held accountable is paramount. Ensuring accountability for chemical weapons use is our responsibility, not least to the victims of such attacks. It is my sincere hope that the members of the Council will unite on this issue. The United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs stands ready to provide whatever support and assistance it can.

Annex II**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations, Geng Shuang**

I thank Mrs. Izumi Nakamitsu, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, for her briefing.

China welcomes the fact that the Syrian Government and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) have maintained communication and cooperation through letters and video-teleconferences. The two sides, continuing their engagement at the technical level, held a secure video-teleconference on 20 July. We call on the OPCW and the Syrian Government to continue that engagement and to resolve pending issues through cooperation.

The chemical-weapons issue is of great concern to all. China objects to the hasty conclusions drawn and the accusations levelled, in the absence of solid evidence, concerning the alleged use of chemical weapons. Rushing to conclusions is not conducive to closing the Syrian chemical-weapons dossier and could even undermine mutual trust among the Syrian parties, thus harming the political process. The Syrian Permanent Mission to the United Nations has submitted a number of letters to the President of the Council offering information and expressing concern. We call on the OPCW and the international community to give attention to and respond to those letters.

The OPCW should endeavour to strengthen mutual trust among States parties and maintain the tradition of taking decisions based on consensus. Questions and different opinions should be encouraged instead of neglected. All parties should engage in dialogue and consultation to reach agreement. Pushing for a vote while there is still significant divergence only causes confrontation and undermines cooperation. That is harmful to the OPCW's authority, operation and long-term interests. Unfortunately, such practices have been used several times in the OPCW. Many countries, including China, are seriously concerned.

With regard to the decision to establish the Investigation and Identification Team and the recent decision taken at the ninety-fourth session of the Executive Council, China's position is firm and clear. I would like to emphasize that the OPCW should strictly comply with the provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) in the conduct of its work instead of being used as a geopolitical tool by certain States parties. The international community should join hands to maintain the professionalism, objectiveness and impartiality of the OPCW and reject any attempts at politicization.

As a CWC State party, China firmly opposes the use of chemical weapons for any purpose by any country, organization or individual, under any circumstance.

Finally, I have two questions for Mrs. Nakamitsu.

First, the latest report of the OPCW briefly mentions the technical meeting held on 20 July between the Technical Secretariat and the Syrian Government. We would like to know the agenda of that meeting and its outcome.

Secondly, what role can the Technical Secretariat and the Director-General play to help the OPCW return to its consensus-based decision-making practice?

Annex III

Statement by the Permanent Mission of the Dominican Republic to the United Nations

We thank Mrs. Izumi Nakamitsu for her briefing this afternoon.

First, we consider that the cooperation of the Syrian Arab authorities with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) is paramount in order to achieve progress on this issue; this includes finding a resolution to the outstanding issues in order to fulfil the mandate of bringing about the total elimination of chemical weapons in Syria, in accordance with resolution 2118 (2013).

In that vein, we commend the video-teleconference between the Syrian authorities and the OPCW secretariat held on 20 July. We are hopeful that this engagement will lead to the restoration of the technical rounds of consultations under the action plan outlined by the secretariat.

We also look forward to the resumption of missions and deployments to the Syrian Arab Republic when the restrictions due to the coronavirus disease outbreak are lifted. It is commendable that despite the disruptions to its work resulting from the pandemic, the secretariat has continued to fulfil its mandate and its engagement with Syria.

The Dominican Republic encourages the Syrian Arab Republic, as a State party to the Convention, to actively collaborate in good faith with the OPCW with a view to resolving pending matters, in particular to clarify the gaps and inconsistencies in its initial declaration.

We call on it to fulfil its obligations emanating from the decision of the OPCW Executive Council of 9 July, based on the conclusions of the first report of the Investigation and Identification Team, which confirmed that toxic chemical agents were indeed used as weapons on three occasions by the Syrian Arab Air Force in the city of Ltamenah in March 2017.

As we have stated previously, the normalizing of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic, which has been confirmed in numerous occasions by the fact-finding mission, the Joint Investigative Mechanism and, more recently, the Investigation and Identification Team, must come to an end, as must the culture of impunity, which is unacceptable.

When we address the use of chemical weapons, it is usually through technical discussions of protocols and regulations that countries in general are required to abide by, but we must always keep in mind that we are actually talking about the lives of children, women and men that have been greatly impacted by those heinous actions. Thousands of people have died and many others have been affected physically and psychologically; nevertheless, there has been no resolution to those crimes and, subsequently, no vindication for the survivors or closure for the families of the dead. The identification of perpetrators is the first step towards accountability, and the responsibility lies with us to ensure a responsible pursuit of justice for the grave violations committed.

We also have to strengthen our efforts to prevent the development and use of such weapons by non-State or State actors alike; thus the support and cooperation of the international community for the OPCW is essential in that endeavour. In addition, we urge unity in the Council and the fostering of dialogue among all parties so as to find a viable political solution to this long-lasting issue.

On another aspect, the Dominican Republic expresses its unwavering support for and full confidence in the professional, objective and impartial work of the OPCW

in its task of definitively relegating to the past the utilization of chemical weapons. Likewise, we extend our support to the Investigation and Identification Team in its efforts to identify the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons in Syria.

To conclude, the Dominican Republic reiterates its firm condemnation of the use of chemical weapons anywhere, by anyone and under any circumstances. Their use is unjustifiable and constitutes a flagrant violation of international law and of the Chemical Weapons Convention and a threat to international peace and security.

Annex IV

Statement by the Permanent Representative of Estonia to the United Nations, Sven Jürgenson

I thank High Representative Nakamitsu for her briefing on the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013).

Last 21 August marked the seventh anniversary of the chemical-weapons attack that took place in the Damascus suburb of Ghouta. That attack remains one of the most horrendous, large-scale atrocities conducted during the Syrian conflict by the Al-Assad regime against its own people. The Syrian Network for Human Rights has documented that during the Ghouta attacks at least 1,144 individuals suffocated to death; 1,119 of them were civilians, including 99 children and 194 women.

Despite Syria's accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention in 2013, its Government forces have continued to use sarin gas and chlorine bombs to suppress the opposition and terrorize civilians and punish them for their demand to end the dictatorship. The regime has conducted almost all of the verified chemical-weapons attacks that have taken place in Syria. The Joint Investigative Mechanism and the Investigation and Identification Team have determined that in seven instances altogether the Syrian regime was responsible for using chemical weapons against its people.

Since to date Syria has failed to declare and destroy all of its chemical weapons and their production facilities, we have not been assured that new attacks will not happen again.

Estonia condemns the use of chemical weapons in the strongest terms. Any use of such weapons is a grave violation of international law. The seriousness of such acts is further supported by the Security Council's determination, in its resolution 2118 (2013), that the use of chemical weapons anywhere constitutes a threat to international peace and security.

Yet, regrettably, so far chemical-weapons attacks in Syria have largely been committed with impunity. The Council has so far failed to uphold its own decisions or to discuss seriously how to move forward with accountability measures and put an end to such horrific crimes. Instead, we see systematic efforts on the part of the Russian Federation to discredit and undermine the competence and authority of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and question the validity of the reports of its investigative bodies whenever their conclusions do not fit with Russia's political agenda and interests.

Those actions have serious consequences. We are allowing the norm against the use of chemical weapons to erode. We are allowing a new normal, where chemical weapons are used to eliminate political rivals and punish the opposition. We have already seen an alarming increase in their use over the past years.

Just last week, we learned about the usage of a chemical nerve agent of the Novichok group to poison Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny. We strongly condemn the attack and call for an impartial and international investigation that would include the experts of the OPCW. We urge Russia to cooperate and provide an account of how the nerve agent came to be used in the poisoning of Mr. Navalny.

Unfortunately, this is not the first time that Novichok, a military-grade nerve agent, has been used against people who Russia perceives as adversaries. The 2018 attack against Sergei and Yulia Skripal on British soil and the poisoning of Navalny show a pattern. In a similar fashion, in 2017 the North Korean regime used the nerve agent VX to assassinate Kim Jong Un's brother in a Malaysian airport.

Estonia is convinced that a robust international response is essential to hold those responsible to account for the use of chemical weapons, seek justice for the victims and prevent such attacks from happening again. The Security Council and all its members have a responsibility to protect the international non-proliferation regime, which underpins our collective security. The use of a weapon of mass destruction anywhere, by anyone and under any circumstances is not and cannot become acceptable.

Annex V**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations, Nathalie Broadhurst Estival**

[Original: English and French]

I thank Mrs. Izumi Nakamitsu for her briefing.

Seven years have elapsed since the regime's chemical attacks on Ghouta and the adoption of resolution 2118 (2013). France therefore deplores the lack of progress on the Syria chemical weapons dossier. To this day, several questions remain unanswered with regard to the Syrian regime's stocks. It is imperative that the Syrian regime shed full light on its initial declaration and cooperate actively with all the teams of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). If the regime has nothing to hide and the chemical weapons file is closed, as some claim, why does it not cooperate fully with the OPCW Technical Secretariat? The security of civilians, already heavily affected by repeated attacks, is at stake.

There is no doubt about the Syrian regime's responsibility for the use of chemical weapons against its own population. The conclusions of international investigation mechanisms are undeniable. The first report of the OPCW's Investigation and Identification Team independently and impartially established, in April, that sarin and chlorine had been used by the Syrian regime's air force units in chemical attacks in Ltamenah in March 2017, resulting in dozens of casualties. Those findings complement those of the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism, which was established by the members of the Council.

In the face of this unprecedented challenge to the chemical weapons non-proliferation regime, it is our collective responsibility to reaffirm the founding principles of collective security.

That is why, in July, France welcomed the adoption by the OPCW Executive Council of a decision proposed on behalf of 40 sponsors. That decision condemned the violations of the Chemical Weapons Convention and enjoined Syria to comply with its obligations or expose itself to collective measures. The next Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention, in November, will consider the report of the OPCW Director General on the responses provided by the Syrian regime to the Technical Secretariat and may take action accordingly. France has full confidence in the unassailable professionalism, integrity and impartiality of the OPCW teams.

Finally, France will continue to support the accountability mechanisms that we have put in place to combat impunity, such as 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. The fight against impunity is an essential element of preserving international peace and security and creating the necessary conditions for a just and lasting peace in Syria, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015).

The use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere and under any circumstance is unacceptable. It constitutes a threat to international peace and security, as affirmed by the Security Council in presidential statement S/PRST/2019/14, adopted on 22 November 2019. That is France's consistent position against the use of chemical weapons and for the perpetrators of chemical attacks to be punished. There can be no exception in Syria or elsewhere. France will continue to work actively, in close cooperation with its partners, to that end, particularly through the International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons.

Annex VI

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Indonesia to the United Nations

My delegation thanks Under-Secretary-General Nakamitsu for her briefing, and takes note of the eighty-third monthly report (S/2020/871, annex) of the Director General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) on its activities to advance the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013).

It is clear that there are diverging views within the Council with regard to the Syrian chemical weapons dossier. However, Indonesia believes that all members of the Council have a common goal — to permanently eliminate the use of chemical weapons. We therefore also believe that the Security Council must continue to support efforts of the OPCW and the Syrian Government in addressing the remaining outstanding issues. In that context, I would like to highlight several points.

First, we need enhanced engagement between the OPCW and the Syrian Arab Republic. Continued good-faith dialogue and constructive cooperation are critical. Substantive and results-oriented engagement is indeed essential for this issue to move forward. I think everyone would agree that we cannot conduct business as usual if we want to fully implement resolution 2118 (2013).

We welcome the recent technical coordination, via secure video-teleconference, between the OPCW Technical Secretariat and the Syrian authority. We are pleased to note that despite the various measures implemented due to the COVID-19 pandemic, both parties are still able to cooperate. Indonesia appreciates the readiness of both the OPCW and the Syrian National Authority to continue relevant consultations.

My delegation also recognizes the Syrian Arab Republic's position of welcoming the visit, once international travel allows, of the Declaration Assessment Team to hold the twenty-third session of consultations. In that regard, we encourage the Syrian Arab Republic to provide the information requested by the OPCW as part of the preparation process for the next round of consultations.

Secondly, I stress the importance of comprehensive, impartial and transparent investigations into all alleged chemical weapons incidents. My delegation believes that this element is key to obtaining conclusive evidence and eliminating doubts or misinterpretations. We support the work of the OPCW in that regard, and emphasize that it is crucial not to politicize its technical mandates.

Thirdly, the importance of the Council's unity in preventing the recurrence of the use of chemical weapons in Syria cannot be overemphasized. At the end of the day, it is not the format of meetings that matter — whether open or closed, or virtual or in-person — but rather our ability to ensure that our monthly deliberations contribute to clarifying all of the outstanding issues regarding the elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme.

All efforts to close the issue of the Syrian chemical weapons programme should also consider the political and humanitarian aspects. A political settlement is the only way forward to end the Syrian crisis and mitigate the humanitarian crisis.

In conclusion, Indonesia condemns in the strongest possible terms the use of chemical weapons anywhere, at any time, by anyone and under any circumstances, and stresses that the use of chemical weapons is unacceptable and a threat to international peace and security.

Annex VII**Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Niger to the United Nations, Abdou Abarry**

[Original: English and French]

I thank Mrs. Izumi Nakamitsu for her briefing. We also thank the Secretary-General and the entire team of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) for the report contained in document S/2020/871.

Although the United Nations has made great efforts since 2013 to establish responsibility for the multiple cases of use of chemical weapons in Syria, it is regrettable to note that all such efforts, which led to the Council's adoption of resolution 2118 (2013), have not made it possible to establish, in a manner acceptable to all, responsibility for the atrocities committed.

My delegation therefore calls on the Syrian Government and all other actors in the conflict to cooperate in good faith with the OPCW investigation teams in order to advance those investigations.

In addition, as we have stated during previous meetings on this issue, any investigation on this issue and the composition of any team that is to investigate the listed incidents must be inclusive and participatory so as to ensure that the findings are not contested. Indeed, the lack of consensus on how to deal with the issue of chemical weapons use in Syria hampers our ability to hold the real perpetrators of those acts accountable and leaves the victims without recourse.

In that regard, my delegation believes that the divergent assessments among the members of the Council must give way to a calm and technical analysis of the results of the investigations carried out in order to guarantee the integrity of the OPCW's reports.

Continued engagement between the OPCW Technical Secretariat and the Syrian Government will help to resolve the issue of the Syrian Arab Republic's initial declaration and will ultimately advance the work of the Declaration Assessment Team, in accordance with the Chemical Weapons Convention, OPCW Executive Council decision EC-M-33/DEC.1 and Security Council resolution 2118 (2013).

In addition, allegations that armed terrorist groups in Syria are in possession of chemicals and may be preparing to mount a chemical weapons attack under a false flag should not be overlooked. My delegation reiterates its appeal to the United Nations and the OPCW Technical Secretariat to pay attention to those allegations, which, if substantiated, would be very dangerous, not only for the region but for the entire world, because those weapons could be transferred to other non-State entities or even to terrorist groups.

In conclusion, as a party to the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Niger has consistently said that the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere and under any circumstance is unacceptable as it constitutes a violation of international law.

Finally, whether we are discussing humanitarian, political or chemical weapons issues, we are of the view that respect for Syria's sovereignty and integrity is fundamental to the search for a lasting solution to the crisis.

Annex VIII

Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, Vassily Nebenzia

We would like to thank Mrs. Izumi Nakamitsu for presenting the eighty-third monthly report (S/2020/871, annex) of the Director General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) on the implementation of Security Council resolution 2118 (2013).

The Syrian chemical dossier has been on the agenda of the Security Council for seven years. We have discussed it mostly in closed format. But upon our request, the Security Council meeting on this topic today is open to the general audience. We did this because we believe that the Council has nothing to hide from the world, and nor has Syria. Everyone who is interested deserves an opportunity to form a judgment on how this issue is discussed in the Security Council. It is difficult to address every aspect of the Syrian chemical dossier in one statement. Suffice it to say that this is one of the most politicized items the Security Council is currently dealing with. However, let me recall some basic facts.

In 2014, Syria's chemical weapons programme was shut down, all its chemical weapons stockpiles eliminated and its production facilities destroyed. Damascus has no capacity, intent or, most importantly, clear or explicable reason to use chemical weapons. Their use would provide no benefits on the battlefield, but would instead put Syria in a vulnerable position, as can be seen in the retaliation and the accusations levelled at it every time allegations of their use have been made. The Syrian Arab Republic is fully cooperating with the OPCW and its Technical Secretariat and Declaration Assessment Team, as well as with all investigative missions on the ground. No undeclared chemical weapons stockpiles have been uncovered by the OPCW in the course of numerous intrusive inspections since October 2013. So far, no one has been able to prove the opposite.

Nevertheless, throughout the years, Western countries have continued to accuse the Syrian Government of using chemical weapons, basing their allegations on a number of doubtful, handpicked incidents, with a total disregard for evidence of fact manipulation and of the staging of those incidents.

Let me cite some of those here. One of the early reports of the OPCW fact-finding mission in the Syrian Arab Republic (FFM), which accused the Syrian Government of the use of chemical weapons in Sarmin on 16 March 2015, reflected an absolutely unrealistic scenario. It suggested that a barrel bomb with chlorine, allegedly dropped from a military helicopter, fell through a ventilation shaft into a residential building. It was presumed that the diameter of the barrel fully matched the diameter of the shaft. That contradicts the laws of physics, ballistics and common sense. Even the authors of the report admitted that it was improbable. However, the blame was placed on Damascus.

I turn now to the 7 April 2017 incident in Khan Shaykhun, in which it is alleged that the Syrian Government used sarin. Accusations were made that an uncontrolled aerial bomb was dropped by a Syrian military plane on the target at no less than 5 kilometres distance. However, ballistic analysis, including by independent experts, showed that this is not only technically impossible, but also runs counter to the basic laws of physics. In order to reach the target, the plane would have had to get much closer, which would have rendered it visible for external observation. Besides, the crater left after the alleged bombing resembled a static explosion on the ground rather than an aerial bomb.

The alleged use of sarin in that case was highly questionable, as video footage by the White Helmets, widely circulated by the Western media, featured a so-called rescue team without the necessary protective equipment to handle a sarin attack. There were other numerous inconsistencies, which were fully ignored by the then Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM).

Another bone-chilling story about the crimes of the Syrian “regime” — to use the preferred Western terminology — comes from an incident in Douma on 7 April 2018, when a video of the White Helmets providing first aid to victims of exposure to toxic substances was released. Our military experts, together with Syrian colleagues, managed to find the Syrians captured on that notorious footage. It turned out that these Syrians were not poisoned; rather, they had involuntarily become involved in a staged provocation set up by the White Helmets. The 13 people in question, including a boy named Hassan Diab, confessed as much during a special briefing at OPCW headquarters on 26 April 2018. Subsequently, the White Helmets’ ill-fated video footage suddenly disappeared, just the way the memorable photos of allegedly poisoned children from Khan Shaykhun had done a year before.

The Western narrative on the Douma incident was that the attack was carried out by air-dropped cylinders containing chlorine, which penetrated the roof and entered apartments where people were living. However, further expert investigation of traces found on the cylinders and the scale of the damage showed that they were manually placed at targeted locations rather than dropped by helicopter. In January 2020, we dedicated a special Arria Formula meeting to elucidating the incident and presenting extensive evidence of the staged nature of the episode. The original investigation was marked by deliberate flaws of ballistic, toxicology and chemical analysis, manipulation of the alleged victims, distortion of the conclusions of the FFM team and harassment of experts who had come to alternative conclusions. We have still not received any response from the OPCW Technical Secretariat on these multiple examples of malpractice.

Initially, Russia, just like other responsible States parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), was hopeful that the investigation of all these incidents would be unbiased. However, it became obvious to us very soon that the investigative mechanisms, namely, the FFM and the JIM, had failed to duly fulfil their mandates. By disregarding the so-called chain of custody, which requires that evidence be collected on site and exclusively by the OPCW specialists, the investigative mechanisms have conducted their investigations in clear violation of the CWC. Instead, they have used information provided by dubious sources, including the notorious White Helmets. The gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies in their reports, as well as their bias, have been widely criticized not only by Member States, but also by independent and reputable experts and scientists.

Our experts have produced national reports on all of the foregoing episodes, including the recent report of the so-called Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) on chemical episodes in Latamneh. We have called for a professional dialogue on the IIT’s findings, including on the aforementioned episodes — a dialogue among experts who would be able to understand the validity of conclusions made. But we have been regularly denied such a dialogue. Our Western partners are not interested in one because it will reveal the false nature of the FFM, JIM and IIT conclusions. All they needed was sanctioned proof of the Syrian Government’s guilt, and they got one.

At the same time, the evidence of the use of chemical weapons on Syrian territory by non-State actors, including terrorist groups, has been deliberately neglected. Since 2013, the Syrian Arab Republic has sent more than 200 letters to the United Nations Secretariat about terrorist activities undertaken to prepare and

carry out acts of chemical terrorism. No follow-up measures have been taken with regard to this information.

Russia has repeatedly called on the OPCW Technical Secretariat to adjust its flawed working methodology. We were interested in having an unbiased and fully accountable investigative body at our disposal, not a political tool to back somebody's geopolitical adventures. However, these calls have been met with no response, so there was no other way out for us but to withhold support for the extension of the JIM mandate. Then, in violation of the CWC, our Western colleagues illegally created the so-called OPCW IIT, which was devised to be a useful tool for implicating the Syrian Government and serves no other purpose than to whitewash the true misdeeds, justify the aggression against Syria by three members of the Security Council in April 2017 and April 2018, and continue a maximum-pressure policy against Syria.

The chemical dossier is used as one of many levers to delegitimize the Syrian Government and justify meddling and military intervention. The recent report of the IIT clearly testifies to this. The Russian position on it is explicit in the document we circulated in the Security Council and General Assembly in June. The IIT's gaps, inconsistencies, discrepancies and inherent bias logically follow on the illegitimacy of the IIT itself, coupled with the Technical Secretariat's managerial, infrastructural and policy flaws. As expected, instead of conducting serious investigative work, the team of so-called experts merely reduced itself to retranslating baseless accusations that are unsupported by material evidence or are outright contradictory.

This seven-year-old strategy of fake evidence and manipulations culminated in July 2020, when the OPCW Executive Council adopted an anti-Syrian decision based on the unsubstantiated assumptions of IIT, which in its methodology carries the same original sin as the FFM and the JIM. That document, which was adopted by the narrow margin of one vote, clearly showed how divided the international community is on this subject and how unwilling many countries are to further assist in the crusade against Syria. The decision demands that Syria do what in theory is impossible — that it declare, within 90 days, additional chemical weapons and alleged facilities related to them, meaning those that were destroyed or confirmed to never have existed. We are not so naïve as to fail to see that this is a trap with no backdoor. These demands cannot be met either in theory or in practice, which is why they were put to us. They set a precondition for further steps that the masterminds planned to take after the expiration of these 90 days.

As a founding member of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, we are deeply concerned to see that OPCW — a once respectable organization — has become a tool in a geopolitical game. We call on the Technical Secretariat to adjust its working methods and ethics, abandon malpractice and double standards, and duly fulfil its mandate. In this regard, we insist, at the request of Damascus, that the Technical Secretariat stop delaying the investigations of the incidents, and in particular those that took place in Aleppo on 24 November 2018. It is surprising and unfortunate that the current report does not have a single reference to this issue.

We also insist on the prompt and proper investigation of the recently reported mysterious evaporation of samples containing phosphorus trichloride collected by the Declaration Assessment Team at its twenty-second round of consultations in Damascus in October 2019. It is appalling that this could happen in a certified OPCW laboratory, and it raises a lot of questions. The Technical Secretariat noticed the evaporation problem as early as February 2020; however, it decided to keep the problem secret until the samples had become irreversibly damaged.

We continue to expect a substantive clarification by the Technical Secretariat on the issue surrounding the Douma report and, more crucially, on the steps the Director-General intends to take to address the acts of malpractice that were revealed in this context. With this statement, we are beginning to roll out a series of instructive lessons on the Syrian chemical dossier. More are to follow.

We already know perfectly well the narrative that our Western colleagues will use today — that the conclusions of the IIT, the FFM and the JIM are unquestionable and that the OPCW Technical Secretariat is beyond reproach. We regret to state that this narrative can no longer be used and that it is our Western colleagues alone who have drawn this conclusion.

Second statement by the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, Vassily Nebenzia

I am already long accustomed to the fact that my friend, the German Ambassador, uses the Security Council platform to engage in a bilateral dialogue with me personally. In his statement today, I think he mentioned Russia 10 times more than he mentioned Syria. He bombards me with rhetorical questions that he believes make me petrified and speechless. I am supposed to answer all of them in a row, but I will try to answer at least one that he posed.

I believe that when meeting with President Al-Assad in Damascus, Foreign Minister Lavrov discussed a few things with the Syrian leader, in particular the constricting sanctions that Germany and its allies have imposed on Syria. I do not exclude the possibility that he raised the issue of the Syrian chemical dossier or that he cited the cheating, manipulation and insinuation that Germany and other Western countries have foisted upon the country in this matter. I myself have a few questions, if not a declarative statement, for the German Ambassador.

We had few illusions that certain countries would raise the situation with Alexei Navalny today, despite the fact that it is completely irrelevant to the topic of discussion at hand. Today, we are witnessing in person another attempt at imposing a narrative. This is nothing new; we have seen it before, when it was tested on the case of Sergei Skripal. Incidentally, we are still awaiting answers to pending questions in that case.

With regard to the Alexei Navalny case, everything we have said has been crystal clear. We are the party most interested in knowing what happened, but even a first-year law student understands that any investigation should be preceded by the gathering of evidence and by the development of facts based on the available evidence. In this case, there is a remarkable lack of evidence. Our law enforcement authorities do not have grounds to open an investigation. Our doctors — who, by the way, saved Alexei Navalny — found no chemical-weapon substances in their analyses. While the German laboratory claims it did find chemical substances, Germany has provided us with no evidence that would allow us to conclude that the crime of attempted poisoning was committed, thereby justifying the start of an investigation.

On 27 August, in accordance with the legal assistance agreement between Russia and Germany, we officially submitted a request for such assistance through the Russian Prosecutor-General's Office. For more than a week, our German partners did not respond. We then heard conflicting information about whether the request was being considered; what decision will be taken and when it will be taken remains unclear. I will not speak of the tone in which this lack of clarity was expressed or of the accusations that followed. I would like to stress that our request is fully

legitimate and natural under the circumstances and that it should be honoured in accordance with the agreement between our countries. Moreover, the request serves the exact purpose our German colleagues — and now many others — are invoking, namely, to establish the truth by investigating an alleged crime.

A few days ago, we were told that the samples had been analysed in a Bundeswehr institute. However, the Germans would not share any of their information with us, since that could enable Russia to learn how much the Bundeswehr knows about chemical substances. We then heard that the results were classified. How should we interpret this? What do you think, Mr. President?

At the same time, the German side shared its findings with its allies, and now we hear not only appeals for explanations and to conduct an investigation, but also demands that we confess and plead guilty. The allegation is not just simply immoral and implausible, but it also goes against the rule of law that the German's claim to champion. If they demand explanations, then let us put the facts on the table and compare notes. Why should we trust allegations that are not corroborated by evidence, even if they are, as the German Ambassador says, beyond a reasonable doubt? As of yet, we have received nothing that would allow our relevant authorities to conduct their own de jure investigation, although they did start a de facto investigation, what we call "pre-investigation procedures".

I would also like to recall that according to article VII, paragraph 2 of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC),

“[e]ach State Party shall cooperate with other States Parties and afford the appropriate form of legal assistance”.

If our partners are so committed to the CWC, why do they fail to comply with that provision?

A group of prominent Russian doctors proposed to their German colleagues to jointly discuss the available data on Alexei Navalny's health. But, yet again, this was rejected. We are seeing a paradoxical situation. We ask our German partners to cooperate, but how can we proceed if the German side refuses to cooperate, which prevents the Russian law enforcement agencies from engaging the necessary procedural mechanisms for starting an investigation?

This whole incident cannot but raise questions about whether some foul play is being staged. We will listen carefully to the statements that follow to see what measures are being proposed, discussed or implemented.

This leads to an unavoidable rhetorical question the ancient Romans posed in such situations: *Cui bono?* For whose benefit was the thing done? Here is the answer: *Cui prodest scelus is fecit.* The one who benefits is the one who did it.

Third statement by the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, Vassily Nebenzia

I listened to my German colleague carefully. He was trying to frame the situation as a matter of international significance. He is trying to portray it as having nothing to do with bilateral relations between Germany and Russia. However, I do not think this is the case. Indeed, the Russian Ambassador was at the German Ministry for Foreign Affairs. He was subject to an oral *démarche*. He received none of the materials, data or evidence that we had requested.

I would therefore like to cite the statement issued by the Russian Foreign Ministry yesterday, 9 September. This statement specifies that the German

Ambassador in Moscow was called to the Russian Ministry for Foreign Affairs, where he was reminded that the Russian Federation asked for data from Germany on 27 August, including Mr. Navalny's biodata and the results of the expert analysis — none of which it had received — so that it could study them in a comprehensive manner and verify the German laboratory's findings.

At the end of the statement, in relation to Russian-German bilateral relations, it says — in Russian, so I will have to translate it:

“If these materials are not provided by the German side, this will be regarded by the Russian side as a refusal by the Federal Government of Germany to establish the truth in the context of an objective investigation, and all its former and current actions in relation to Alexei Navalny will be seen as a blatant hostile provocation against Russia, which would definitely undermine Russian-German relations and international relations as a whole.”

Annex IX

Statement by the Counsellor of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to the United Nations, Diani Jamesha Prince

I thank High Representative Nakamitsu for her briefing.

At the outset, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines reaffirms its principled position that the use of chemical weapons anywhere and by anyone constitutes an abominable violation of international law. Chemical-weapon atrocities cannot be ignored, and impunity cannot be encouraged. Perpetrators must be held accountable.

We reiterate our support for the mandate of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). The OPCW bears a tremendous responsibility as the guardian of the Chemical Weapons Convention. It must therefore ensure that all facets and activities, including the work of the Fact-Finding Mission, the Identification and Investigation Team and the Declaration Assessment Team, are impartial, transparent and not politicized. The Organization's findings must be able to withstand rigorous scrutiny to enable States parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention to maintain confidence in its internal structure and processes.

The Security Council should support all efforts to strengthen the Organization's capacity to ensure that the quality of its work remains of the highest standard. The OPCW must be above reproach; anything less erodes trust, undermines its efforts and renders it wholly ineffective.

We should also remain mindful that, in our deliberations on this issue, we ought to consider the perspectives of the Syrian Government, in respect for Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity. We must therefore encourage and facilitate dialogue to build trust, enhance cooperation and thwart divisiveness among States parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention.

We recognize that the coronavirus disease pandemic has necessitated the postponement of planned deployments and missions. Be that as it may, we are pleased to note that technical consultations between the OPCW and Syria continue despite the unprecedented circumstances.

We reiterate the importance of resolving all of the outstanding issues regarding the initial declaration. We commend the continued engagement on this matter, and it is our hope that sustained cooperation between the parties will assist in making progress in this regard.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines shares the vision of a chemical-weapons-free world. And we support all efforts to make certain that applied science and technology is used only for peace, progress and the prosperity of all humankind.

Annex X**Statement by the Permanent Mission of South Africa to the United Nations**

Allow me to thank Mrs. Izumi Nakamitsu, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, for her briefing to the Security Council, and the Director General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) for his eighty-third report (S/2020/871, annex).

I would like to begin by reiterating South Africa's position, which condemns any use of chemical weapons. No cause can ever justify the use of any weapon of mass destruction by any actor under any circumstances. South Africa remains committed to its international obligations as a State party to the Chemical Weapons Convention and as a member of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

South Africa strongly supports multilateralism and the international rule of law, which includes the non-discriminatory and consistent application of the provisions of relevant multilateral instruments, and the preservation of the international norms against weapons of mass destruction, including chemical weapons.

The use of chemical weapons undermines the international norms against the production, use and stockpiling of such weapons, established under the Chemical Weapons Convention. In South Africa's view, the alleged use of chemical weapons by a State party to the Chemical Weapons Convention is a very serious matter that would constitute a material breach of obligations under the Convention.

In order to ensure that States parties adhere to their obligations, it is imperative that they have full faith and confidence in the work and processes of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. As the only technically competent international authority in this area, there can be no political interference in its work. States parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention should therefore unite in preserving the international norm against chemical weapons and the provisions of the Convention, along with its consistent and non-discriminatory implementation.

As indicated on a number of occasions, South Africa will continue to work for the depoliticization of the relevant management and decision-making structures established under the Chemical Weapons Convention, and also towards ensuring that States parties are held accountable for any violations of their obligations, based on credible and irrefutable evidence.

South Africa has taken note of the decision by the Executive Council of the OPCW regarding the use of chemical weapons in Syria. South Africa reiterates its position that this decision is premature and blurs the important distinction between the investigation process by the Investigation and Identification Team and decision-making by the Executive Council on the findings of the report.

It therefore represents a missed opportunity to ensure both procedural and substantive fairness in dealing with this important matter. However, we welcome further discussions on this matter in November at the Conference of the States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction.

In conclusion, South Africa firmly believes that the only sustainable solution to the Syrian question remains the achievement of a political solution through an inclusive Syrian-led dialogue aimed at a political resolution reflective of the will of the people of Syria. We should endeavour to approach the situation in Syria in a holistic manner wherein the political, humanitarian and chemical-weapon tracks all converge in a single unified path to long-term peace, security and stability for Syria.

Annex XI**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations, Jonathan Allen**

I thank you very much, Mr President, and I also want to thank Under-Secretary-General Nakamitsu again for another of her briefings.

In August 2013, when hundreds of people were killed in a United Nations-verified sarin attack on Ghouta, the use of chemical weapons in Syria was regrettably added to the list of violations in an already brutal war. Following that Ghouta attack, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2118 (2013). In that resolution, we — all of us — condemned the use of chemical weapons in Syria. We endorsed the procedures for the destruction of Syria's chemical-weapons programme. We decided that Syria should not produce or use chemical weapons ever again. We decided that it should comply fully with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the United Nations. And we noted Syria's accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Now some Council members would have you, Mr. President, believe that this was the end of it, that Syria's chemical weapons programme was entirely destroyed, that the Syrian regime never used or produced them again and that any use was by non-State actors or that attacks were staged. They maintain that Syria has and continues to comply fully with the OPCW.

However inconvenient they may find the truth, unfortunately their interpretation is not borne out by the facts. Independent United Nations and OPCW fact-finding missions have concluded that chemical weapons have been used in Syria on over 40 occasions since 2014, including the sarin attack on Khan Shaykhun on 4 April 2017, which killed hundreds, and the chlorine attack on Douma on 7 April 2018, which killed dozens of people. These technical missions comprise different experts from many countries who, over many years, all independently came to the same conclusion.

Now it remains impossible, seven years after the adoption of resolution 2118 (2013) and following 83 monthly reports from the Director General of the OPCW, for the Council to verify the complete destruction of Syria's chemical-weapons programme. As we have been told again by the High Representative today, due to the unresolved gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies in Syria's declaration under the Chemical Weapons Convention, that declaration cannot be considered accurate and complete. The outstanding issues are significant, and they go to the heart of Syria's compliance — or rather, non-compliance — with the Convention for the following reasons.

Since 2014, the number of chemical agents identified by the Declaration and Assessment Team as having been in Syria's possession has more than doubled as compared to their initial declaration. The fate of more than 400 tons of chemicals and thousands of munitions is unclear. This includes the whereabouts of 5.2 tons of "DF", which is a key component of sarin, and 2,000 aerial bombs, a delivery system for chemical weapons, including the sarin used in the Khan Shaykhun incident in 2017.

Since their initial declaration, in 2013, the Syrian authorities have themselves admitted to having produced chemical weapons not in the original declaration. That includes ricin, which the Syrian authorities admitted to possessing in 2014. And then Soman, which the regime admitted to possessing in 2016, along with what they call "research and development activities" on nitrogen mustard, which they admitted in

2019. Other so-far-undeclared chemical agents or their precursors or degradation products have been also detected and identified by the OPCW.

Furthermore, the fact that the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) and now the OPCW Investigation and an Identification Team have found the Syrian authorities responsible for using chemical weapons on no fewer than seven occasions is inconsistent with claims that Syria has no chemical weapons capability. And it is notable that the first Investigation and an Identification Team report confirms that Syrian-made aerial bombs of the type unaccounted for in the declaration were used as a delivery system for the attacks in Ltamenah in March 2017.

So, after six years of outstanding compliance issues and further confirmation of the Syrian regime's use of chemical weapons, we welcome the robust, proportionate and reasonable action taken by the OPCW Executive Council in its decision of 9 July. The Executive Council accepted the findings of the Investigation and an Identification Team report, provided a deadline for Syria to comply finally with its obligations and recommended that the Conference of States Parties take action should Syria fail to comply.

And just as the OPCW Executive Council has a role in upholding compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention and its own decisions, so the Security Council has a clear and distinct obligation to address the repeated breaches of resolution 2118 (2013). These breaches include the use of chemical weapons, as identified by both the JIM and the Investigation and an Identification Team; the retention and production of chemical weapons to carry out attacks; and the lack of full compliance with the OPCW. We should do as we decided in resolution 2118 (2013) and take action in response to non-compliance and the threat to international peace and security. Not to do so would be a dereliction of the Council's duty.

The Council should be able to act in unity on the basis of the findings by two independent bodies, which have identified the perpetrators of these chemical-weapon attacks. And so it is a matter of great regret that some Council members have sought to politicize what should be a non-partisan issue and have attempted to undermine and block investigations into chemical-weapon use in Syria and into the perpetrators. They have spread conspiracy theories and disinformation designed to block, undermine and call into question the integrity and reports of the JIM and the Investigation and an Identification Team.

This disinformation we have seen in action today in the form of lengthy, somewhat random assertions about various incidents, which it is claimed undermine the many independent expert teams that have carried out their work. Mud is thrown everywhere in the hope that some will stick somewhere. An anecdotal approach is taken rather than the evidence-based approach taken, in contrast, by the teams carrying out the investigations, which includes the consistency and corroboration of evidence and information obtained from the Fact-Finding Mission, coupled with information obtained through interviews, analyses of samples, reviews of laboratory results and analyses of munition remnants, reports and advice from experts, specialists and forensic institutes, all of which allowed the conclusion to be drawn that units of the Syrian Arab Air Force were responsible for attacks.

By contrast, some Council members would have us put aside the evidence-based approach of independent investigators in favour of what Russian and Syrian military police, engaged in a bloody battle against the Syrian people, say they have discovered.

When the Council sought to take action on the basis of the findings of the JIM in 2016, Russia used its veto to block it. When the JIM found the Syrian regime was

responsible for the chemical attack in Khan Shaykhun, they used their veto to stop the JIM's work. When the OPCW Conference of States Parties established its own identification team, they refused to recognize it, and have since sought to impugn its cross-regional representation. As many have said today, it is vital for upholding the international non-proliferation regime that organizations such as the OPCW and the United Nations be able to act without interference and without politicization of their work.

I do not want to dwell on these issues of division. I believe that the majority of the Security Council accepts the findings of the United Nations and the OPCW and are strong supporters of the OPCW Technical Secretariat, its staff and its integrity. And we hope that when the time comes, members of the Council will act on the evidence and on their conscience.

Others have mentioned the issue of Mr. Alexei Navalny. We are gravely concerned by the poisoning of Mr. Navalny by Novichok, a banned chemical weapon. A similar nerve agent, members will recall, was previously used with lethal effect in the United Kingdom. The United Kingdom has full confidence in Germany's findings, and we stand united with them.

The use of a banned chemical weapon is absolutely unacceptable. As the Council reaffirmed last November in a presidential statement (S/PRST/2019/14), any use of chemical weapons anywhere at any time by anyone under any circumstance is unacceptable and a threat to international peace and security. The Russian Federation should urgently conduct a full and transparent investigation into this use of a banned chemical weapon and should uphold the Chemical Weapons Convention. We cannot allow this behaviour to become normalized.

It is difficult not to conclude that Russia's attacks on the international architecture to prevent the use of chemical weapons are not only designed to protect its Syrian clients but also to protect itself. That is a sad state of affairs. It is also a very dangerous state of affairs for all of us.

Statement by the Political Counsellor of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations, Sonia Farrey

It would take too long to address all the familiar allegations and inaccuracies, but I do want to respond to the point raised on the White Helmets.

The United Kingdom is proud of its support to the White Helmets and their life-saving search and rescue activities in Syria, alongside other donors. The organization is estimated to have saved over 115,000 lives and provided essential services to more than 4 million Syrians.

Allegations linking the White Helmets to terrorist groups are baseless and are part of a concerted disinformation campaign by the Syrian regime and Russia seeking to undermine the White Helmets' valuable work.

Annex XII**Statement by the Acting Deputy Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations, Cherith Norman Chalet**

I thank you, Mr. President, and I thank High Representative Nakamitsu for her briefing.

In 2013, the Security Council adopted resolution 2118 (2013), welcoming the Framework for Elimination of Syrian Chemical Weapons. That Framework expressed the determination of the United States and Russia to “ensure the destruction of the Syrian chemical weapons programme in the soonest and safest manner”. Furthermore, the Framework set the first half of 2014 as the target date for completing the elimination of all chemical weapons material and equipment.

Unfortunately, though, since the adoption of resolution 2118 (2013), the Al-Assad regime has used chemical weapons routinely and indiscriminately to instil fear and force any opposing population to its knees. The regime’s use of chemical weapons is well documented and confirmed by the former Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism, and most recently by the OPCW’s Investigation and Identification Team. The regime’s failure to comply with its international obligations related to the use of chemical weapons — including those obligations it undertook when it voluntarily became a party to the Chemical Weapons Convention and those obligations which are binding on Syria under resolution 2118 (2013) — poses a direct threat to the Syrian people and the prospects for a political resolution to the conflict in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

As we have stated previously, the United States expresses its unequivocal condemnation of the use of chemical weapons, in Syria or anywhere else. The Security Council must act to enforce resolution 2118 (2013) — and step up to reinforce the norm against the use of chemical weapons to ensure that those who have used them are held to account.

This is the third opportunity for the Council to discuss the tragic and callous use of chemical weapons by the Al-Assad regime since the OPCW adopted its decision to hold the regime accountable based on the damning findings of the Investigation and Identification Team. We will continue to shine a light on these horrible events, as the conflict in Syria has brought immeasurable suffering to the Syrian people. Over the past 10 years, the Syrian people have experienced horrific atrocities, some of which rise to the level of war crimes and crimes against humanity, including the repeated use of chemical weapons. The United States condemns in the strongest possible terms the use of these weapons of mass destruction. The Council cannot tolerate the use of such weapons, and we must ensure that those responsible face serious consequences.

The Al-Assad regime’s failure to comply with its international obligations related to the use of chemical weapons poses a direct threat to the international community. Consistent with the OPCW’s July decision, the Al-Assad regime must cease its use of chemical weapons and fully cooperate with the OPCW, including its Investigation and Identification Team.

Let us ensure everyone is reminded of the seriousness of what we are discussing today. On 21 August 2013, the Syrian regime launched a horrific chemical attack with the nerve agent sarin on the opposition-controlled suburb of Ghouta in Damascus, leaving more than 1,400 Syrians, many of them children, dead. Last month marked the seventh anniversary of that attack, and on that date the world remembered the

many lives lost and the need to continue to stand against such cruel disregard for the international norms against the use of chemicals as weapons.

But again, let us remember that these are real people we are talking about — real women, men and children. Do members know what sarin does to a human body? An article in *The Atlantic* from 2013 laid it out clearly:

“The nose runs, the eyes cry, the mouth drools and vomits, and bowels and bladder evacuate themselves ... Since sarin has no taste or smell, the person may very well have no idea what’s going on. Their chest tightens, vision blurs. If the exposure was great enough, that can progress to convulsions, paralysis, and death within 1 to 10 minutes.”

A painful, quick, and undignified death. That is what Al-Assad subjected his own people to in 2013.

Since 2013, the Syrian regime has continued to demonstrate blatant disregard for its international obligations by repeatedly carrying out chemical weapons attacks. The OPCW Investigation and Identification Team report issued on 8 April concluded that the Syrian Arab Air Force was responsible for carrying out three chemical-weapon attacks in late March 2017, two sarin attacks and one chlorine attack, affecting over 100 people. The attacks took place just days before the attack on nearby Khan Shaykhun in April 2017, which killed dozens of people. The OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism found the Al-Assad regime was also responsible for the Khan Shaykhun attack.

The United States remains committed to a sustained campaign of economic and political pressure to deny the Al-Assad regime the revenue and support it uses to bypass a United Nations-facilitated political settlement to the conflict by committing mass atrocities against the Syrian people. We reject the Al-Assad regime’s efforts to use such atrocities to silence its people’s calls for reform and change. Last week, we continued our sanctions campaign against Al-Assad’s corrupt and brutal regime. These new sanctions memorialize the victims of Al-Assad’s chemical-weapon attack on Ghouta seven years ago. And we continue to reject any false claim that United States sanctions adversely affect humanitarian efforts. We will not stop pressing for accountability and an enduring political solution to the Syrian conflict, as called for in resolution 2254 (2015).

Furthermore, we will not stop pressing for Iran to leave Syria. Iran supports the Al-Assad regime as the regime continues to devastate and destroy the lives of hundreds of thousands of its own citizens. Syria is one of many countries, like Lebanon, Yemen and Saudi Arabia, where Iran sows chaos and devastation through its proliferation of weapons. Iran’s destabilizing behaviour is one of the reasons that we have chosen to trigger the reimposition of United Nations sanctions on Iran. We call on our fellow Security Council members to join us in ensuring that Iran does not have access to even more potent weapons to cause even greater destruction.

I also want to say that we are deeply troubled by the findings released by the German Government on 2 September. Alexei Navalny’s poisoning by a chemical weapon is completely reprehensible, and we condemn this action in the strongest possible terms. Any use of chemical weapons, anywhere, at any time, by anybody, under any circumstances whatsoever, is unacceptable and contravenes the international norms prohibiting the use of such weapons.

Russia has used chemical nerve agents from the Novichok group in the past. The Russian people have a right to express their views without fear of retribution of any kind. They should certainly not be subjected to chemical agents. Wherever the

evidence leads, we will work with allies and the international community to hold perpetrators accountable, including through restricting funds for malign activities.

We call on Russia to be fully transparent and to bring those responsible to justice. We urge Russia to cooperate fully with the international community's investigation into this latest attack. Those responsible — both those who committed this attack and those who ordered it — must be held accountable.

I will say it again: the use of chemical weapons presents an unacceptable security threat to all States, and the members of the Council must not stay silent. We renew our call on the Al-Assad regime to come into compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention without delay, and our call on everyone to stop the use of chemical weapons once and for all. The use of chemical weapons, anywhere and at any time, is wrong. We must work as a Council to stop it.

Annex XIII**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Viet Nam to the United Nations, Pham Hai Anh**

I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu for her briefing today.

At today's meeting, we would like to emphasize the following points.

First, my delegation would like to stress Viet Nam's categorical condemnation of the use of chemical weapons in any form, by anyone, anywhere, under any circumstances or for any reason.

It is our consistent policy to advocate for the complete disarmament and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. We believe that the obligations of States parties to respect and fully implement the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) are undoubtedly of utmost importance to fulfilling the common commitment to a world free of chemical weapons.

Secondly, as a committed advocate of multilateralism and international law, Viet Nam supports the work entrusted to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) by the CWC. It is imperative that the OPCW, that is, all of the States parties and all of its relevant bodies and mechanisms, strictly abide by the Convention. While being conducted in line with the CWC, investigations into any possible use of chemical weapons should focus on the goal of establishing irrefutable facts and evidence. Therefore, it is fundamental that all investigations be carried out in a comprehensive, conclusive, objective and impartial manner, based on verified information and without any politicization.

Thirdly, Viet Nam would like to express concern over the reported use of chemical weapons in Syria, which can have disastrous and long-term effects on civilians and their living environment.

The actual implementation of the CWC hinges upon primarily each State party as well as their nationals and all persons on its territory or under its jurisdiction.

We take note of the continued engagement during the reporting period between the OPCW Technical Secretariat and the relevant Syrian authorities in the face of certain obstacles caused by the coronavirus disease in the past few months, including the video-teleconference between the OPCW Technical Secretariat and the Syrian National Authority on 27 July, the submission of Syria's eighty-first report on 18 August, and so on.

We believe that continued cooperation and engagement can help address and clarify all outstanding issues. We look forward to the finalization of the plan of action for the resolution of outstanding issues as well as the rescheduling of the twenty-third round of consultations between the Declaration Assessment Team and the Syrian National Authority.

From our own experience, we have found that the cooperation with and assistance by the OPCW have been quite useful at all stages of CWC implementation, from the initial declaration to all types of inspections, technical assistance visits and soon. We call on all relevant parties to enhance dialogue and cooperation, in a constructive and non-politicized manner, to fully address the remaining gaps and work towards the full implementation of resolution 2118 (2013).

Fourthly, as a member of the OPCW, we take note of the Executive Council's Decision dated 9 July 2020, entitled "Addressing the Possession and Use of Chemical

Weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic”, and we also note that divergent views remain regarding that decision.

Viet Nam will continue to closely follow and actively engage in the relevant mechanisms.

Last but not least, we would like to stress the importance of unity in addressing the issue of chemical weapons in Syria. A strong agreement, perhaps as in the case of our consensual support for the political process, is very much needed to find a long-term solution to this issue.

To bring about sustainable peace and stability in Syria and the region, Viet Nam would like to reiterate our support for the Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process, pursuant to resolution 2254 (2015) and in full adherence to international law and the United Nations Charter.

Annex XIV**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations, Feridun Sinirlioğlu**

I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for having organized this meeting and to thank also the High Representative for her briefing. We welcome the open format of this meeting, which contributes to efforts to keep this topic high on the agenda of the international community.

The use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime has been part of its brutal war against its own people, with devastating humanitarian consequences. Indeed, 21 August marked the seventh anniversary of the horrific Ghouta sarin attack by the Al-Assad regime. In that single incident, the resident pawn in Damascus and his regime killed hundreds of civilians in cold blood. This was yet another appalling crime committed by the regime against humanity, this time with prohibited weapons. The perpetrators of this attack are yet to be held accountable.

Emboldened by a growing sense of impunity, the regime continued to resort to chemical weapons repeatedly in the following years. The regime's crimes are well documented by the United Nations-Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Joint Investigative Mechanism. The Mechanism confirmed that the Syrian regime was responsible for using toxic substances in Talmenes, on 21 April 2014; Sarmin, on 16 March 2015; and Qmenas, on 16 March 2015; and that it once again used sarin in Khan Shaykhun on 4 April 2017.

The Al-Assad regime was shielded from being held immediately accountable for its continued use of chemical weapons by the dismantling of the Joint Investigative Mechanism at the end of 2017, and the use of chemical weapons by the regime continued unabated. The OPCW fact-finding mission reported the additional use of toxic chemicals in Ltamenah in March 2017 and in Douma in April 2018.

The regime's history of repeatedly using chemical weapons against its own people cannot be disputed. Turkey has strongly condemned the use of chemical weapons by the regime from the very beginning. We remain determined to hold it accountable for the indiscriminate killing of innocent children, women and men with those heinous weapons.

We welcomed the establishment of the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) last year and supported its efforts to identify the perpetrators of the chemical-weapons attacks in Syria. The first report of the IIT issued last April concluded that the Syrian regime's air force was the perpetrator of the three chemical-weapons attacks that took place in Ltamenah on 24, 25 and 30 March 2017. We consider that report as an important step towards ensuring that those responsible for the chemical-weapons attacks in Syria are held accountable for their crimes. At the same time, we look forward to the conclusion of the current investigations carried out by both the fact-finding mission and the IIT on other cases.

Now that we have ample evidence of and documentation about the perpetrators of those attacks, it is high time justice was served. To that end, the cooperation between the OPCW Secretariat and the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for Syria is significant and must continue.

We also commend the ongoing work of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry, which continues to contribute substantively to investigating the use of chemical weapons in Syria.

Turkey reiterates its strong support for the important work of the fact-finding mission and the Declaration Assessment Team. We underscore our full trust in the

professionalism and impartiality of the mission and the objectivity of its reports. It would serve no party's interest to question the credibility of the fact-finding mission.

While the Al-Assad regime's record of use of chemical weapons is growing, the gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies stemming from the initial declaration of the regime continue. The pandemic should not be used as an excuse for the delay in addressing this pressing problem. We expect the full implementation of resolution 2118 (2013).

The regime keeps insulting our intelligence by repeating the illusory statement that it has no chemical-weapon stockpiles. This cannot continue. The regime must be forced to undertake a results-oriented cooperation with the OPCW. The decision adopted during the ninety-fourth session of the OPCW Executive Council is a crucial step forward in addressing the possession and use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime.

At the same time, the decision sets clear and verifiable parameters for action that the regime needs to take. Turkey gladly co-sponsored that decision.

The Al-Assad regime and its backers have been indiscriminately killing civilians, including children, for the past nine years. They must and will be held accountable for those crimes. If we fail to act urgently and decisively, there is no guarantee that the regime will not use chemical weapons again. We particularly recall the responsibility of those parties that have influence on the Syrian regime in this regard.

The Al-Assad regime's culpability in horrific chemical attacks is undeniable. Turkey will continue to support all the steps taken by the international community, first and foremost the United Nations and the OPWC, for ensuring full accountability in Syria.

We echo the call of the Secretary-General. The Security Council must act firmly and in unity. This is the least we can do to ensure justice for the innocent victims of chemical attacks in Syria.

As for the delusional remarks of the regime representative, I would like to emphasize that they are nothing but futile efforts to divert the international community's attention from the Syrian regime's well-documented record of the use of chemical weapons. He is not a legitimate representative of the Syrian people and is not worthy of my reply.