



Security Council

Eightieth year

9874th meeting

Friday, 7 March 2025, 10 a.m.

New York

Provisional

President: Ms. Lassen (Denmark)

Members:

Algeria.....	Mr. Bendjama
China	Mr. Sun Zhiqiang
France	Mr. Dharmadhikari
Greece	Mr. Sekeris
Guyana	Ms. Benn
Pakistan.....	Mr. Akram
Panama	Mr. Alfaro de Alba
Republic of Korea	Mr. Hwang
Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
Sierra Leone	Mr. George
Slovenia.....	Ms. Jurečko
Somalia	Mr. Osman
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland ..	Mr. Eckersley
United States of America.....	Ms. Shea

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Letter dated 26 February 2025 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2025/127)

* Reissued for technical reasons on 14 March 2025.

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

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Letter dated 26 February 2025 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2025/127)

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

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

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

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2025/127, which contains the text of a letter dated 26 February 2025 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council.

I now give the floor to Mrs. Nakamitsu.

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

Since the previous consideration of this matter by the Council (see S/PV.9800), and consistent with established practice, the Office for Disarmament Affairs has been in regular contact with its counterparts in the Technical Secretariat of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) on activities related to the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013). I spoke to Director General Arias on 28 February and received a full briefing, and I also had the pleasure of meeting with Ambassador Aldahhak of Syria on 3 March.

Since the Council's previous meeting on this matter, and as we all know, a new political reality has emerged in Syria. As the Secretary-General has emphasized, the people of Syria are now facing an historic opportunity to build a stable and peaceful future for the Syrian people after 14 years of brutal war. As part of that stable and peaceful future, the new reality also presents an opportunity to obtain long-overdue clarifications on the full extent and scope of the Syrian chemical weapons programme, rid the country of all chemical weapons, normalize relations with the OPCW and ensure long-term compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention. Syria has started to take steps towards that objective.

The importance of closing all outstanding issues related to Syria's chemical weapons dossier cannot be overstated. As I reported before, the previous Syrian authorities submitted 20 amendments to the Syrian Arab Republic's initial declaration. However, the OPCW Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) was never able to confirm that the declaration submitted was accurate and complete because of the insufficient and inaccurate information it contained. Over the past 11 years, the DAT has raised and reported a total of 26 outstanding issues with Syria's declaration, of which 19 remain unresolved. The OPCW Technical Secretariat has reported that the substance of the 19 outstanding issues remains a serious concern, as it involves large quantities of potentially undeclared or unverified chemical warfare agents and chemical munitions. In addition, the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission and the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team have documented the use of chemical weapons

in Syria and, in a number of incidents, identified the Syrian Arab Armed Forces as the perpetrators. The OPCW Technical Secretariat has therefore reported that it is undeniable that the previous authorities in Syria did not declare the full extent of the Syrian chemical weapons programme and that they continued to use, and possibly produce, chemical weapons after joining the Chemical Weapons Convention in 2013.

The situation left by the previous Syrian authorities is extremely worrisome. I am therefore encouraged that the new authorities have expressed their desire and commitment to embark on a new chapter of cooperation with the OPCW to close the outstanding issues. On 8 February, the OPCW Director General and a high-level delegation from the OPCW Technical Secretariat visited Damascus, at the invitation of the caretaker Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Asaad Al-Shaibani. During that visit, the Director General also met with Mr. Ahmed Al-Sharaa, who gave assurances of the new authorities' intent to cooperate with the OPCW. Following the visit, I was informed that, on 21 February, the Director General received a letter from the caretaker Minister for Foreign Affairs with the appointment of a focal point for chemical weapons matters within the Ministry. Shortly thereafter, the focal point official travelled to The Hague for in-person meetings with the OPCW Technical Secretariat on how to advance the OPCW's nine-point action plan for Syria.

I am also encouraged by the statement made by the caretaker Minister for Foreign Affairs on Wednesday at this week's session of the OPCW Executive Council, in which he emphasized the new authorities' commitment to destroying any remains of the chemical weapons programme developed under the previous authorities, bringing justice to the victims and ensuring Syria's compliance with international law. I am pleased to note that, as a result of the renewed commitment, the new Syrian authorities and the OPCW Technical Secretariat have already begun to work towards those goals. In the coming days, a team of technical experts from the OPCW Technical Secretariat will be deployed to Damascus to work on establishing the OPCW's permanent physical presence in Syria and start jointly planning deployments to chemical weapons sites.

The OPCW Technical Secretariat remains fully committed to implementing its mandate aimed at verifying the fulfilment of the Syrian Arab Republic's declaration obligations under the Convention, decisions by OPCW policymaking organs and Security Council resolutions. Furthermore, the commitment of the caretaker authorities in Syria to fully and transparently cooperate with the OPCW Technical Secretariat is commendable. That said, the work ahead will not be easy. The new reality, while presenting an opportunity to chart a new course for Syria, also presents significant challenges amid significant humanitarian, security and recovery needs in the country. In order to accomplish all the tasks needed to rid Syria of all chemical weapons, the OPCW Technical Secretariat and the new authorities in Syria will require strong support and additional resources from the international community.

I urge the members of the Council to unite and show leadership in providing the support that this unprecedented effort will require. This is a priority action directly addressing the future security of Syria, that of States in the region and that of the global community. The United Nations stands ready to provide support however it can and will continue to do its part to uphold the norm against the use of chemical weapons — anywhere, at any time.

The President: I thank Mrs. Nakamitsu for her briefing.

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

Ms. Shea (United States of America): I thank High Representative Izumi Nakamitsu, whose testimony highlights the gravity of the situation facing the Syrian people.

President Trump responded to the Al-Assad regime's barbaric use of chemical weapons against innocent civilians in Syria with military strikes in 2017, and then again in 2018 with our allies, France and the United Kingdom. That is how to achieve peace through strength.

We have an historic opportunity to close this dark chapter in history and to start a new one — creating a Syria that is safer for its people and more secure for the region and the world. All elements of the Al-Assad regime's chemical weapons programme must now be secured, declared and safely destroyed under international verification. That imperative is twofold: to bring Syria into compliance with its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention and, critically, to ensure that any remaining elements do not end up in the wrong hands.

The window of opportunity is short. All stakeholders need to act quickly to facilitate the work of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). The United States welcomes the initial positive steps taken by the OPCW and the interim Syrian authorities. We are encouraged that, as the High Representative just noted, following OPCW Director General Arias' historic visit to Damascus, the Syrian interim authorities named a focal point for chemical weapons in order to commence that work. The OPCW has a tremendously important mission before it, one that contributes directly to global security and that requires support from all. And we in the Council have a responsibility to finish what we started back in 2013, when the Council adopted resolution 2118 (2013) with the aim of eliminating Syria's chemical weapons programme and holding to account those responsible for the use of chemical weapons. We must remain seized of that critical matter until the work is done.

We all seek to achieve a world free of chemical weapons. Achieving that goal will help us in our pursuit of peace in the region and around the world. Let us move one step closer by supporting the OPCW as it assumes that vital role in Syria.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Mrs. Izumi Nakamitsu, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, for her briefing.

We paid particular attention to those passages in the monthly report by Mr. Fernando Arias, Director General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), following his visit to Damascus in February that are aimed at the full-fledged resumption of the work of the OPCW Declaration Assessment Team in the country. On the whole, we welcome any developments that could contribute to resolving the outstanding issues related to Syria's initial declaration, on the understanding that the leadership of the OPCW Technical Secretariat and the States parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention will ensure a depoliticized, impartial and professional approach to closing the Syrian chemical file.

We stand ready to contribute constructively to efforts to close the aforementioned file. We are all well aware that it was thanks to Russia's efforts that Syria acceded to the Chemical Weapons Convention in 2013 and placed its chemical arsenal under international control. However, we are not going to indulge attempts to politicize that issue, nor will we level unsubstantiated accusations against the former Government or spin that topic using various fabrications. Any artificial deadlines and attempts to settle scores with the pretext of closing the Syrian chemical file are unacceptable.

Unfortunately, we still have reasonable doubts about the OPCW's ability to perform its purely technical functions in good faith, given that the level of politicization of its work has been off the charts for many years. Further evidence of the existing problems can be found in what is — to put it mildly — contentious language in the report that we are discussing today, in which it is stated that the current political situation in the Syrian Arab Republic is supposedly conducive to

the OPCW Technical Secretariat receiving the fullest possible volume and scope of information on Syria's chemical-military programme.

First, such assessments go far beyond the mandate of the OPCW Technical Secretariat.

Secondly, it is unclear how we can discuss any new or additional inspections at sites or evidence gathering in the field when the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic has been subjected to bombing on several occasions — suffice it to recall the French President's dramatic assertions in April 2018 about the destruction of Syrian chemical weapons production and storage facilities. The massive missile strikes carried out by Israel over the past three months, with the aim of eliminating any trace of Syria's military defence capabilities, have rendered such a statement of the problem completely meaningless.

Under those circumstances, we can hardly be sure that the deployment of a full-fledged OPCW mission in Syria will not be reduced to the spinning of further provocations and indiscriminate accusations that Syria is allegedly using chemical weapons and concealing part of its former military-chemical programme. We would like to warn the Council right away that, given the OPCW Technical Secretariat's working methods and the practice of establishing illegitimate structures under its auspices, which we have witnessed in recent years, the international community would have no confidence in any of that entity's conclusions.

Against that backdrop, we are alarmed by the recent statements of the OPCW Technical Secretariat about the alleged obstruction of its work in Syria by the former Syrian authorities. Such allegations seem inappropriate, since it is the Technical Secretariat's leadership that repeatedly refused to meet with the head of the relevant Syrian national authority in charge of the Chemical Weapons Convention in Damascus, even though such a meeting could have facilitated the settlement of contentious issues. Regardless of the current political context, we should not forget that from the very moment that they joined the Convention, the Syrians always demonstrated unprecedented openness and willingness to cooperate with the OPCW — an openness that the OPCW did not reciprocate. In Syria, as far as we are aware, there is simply no one with whom we can talk, professionally, and that makes the current situation even more complicated. That is because all the people who used to be in charge of interaction with the OPCW are no longer there.

Furthermore, when working on the Syrian chemical file under these new conditions, we must keep in mind the numerous instances of the use of toxic chemicals and chemical warfare agents by radicalized extremist groups, including the fighters of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). ISIL possesses the technological and production capacity to synthesize various chemicals prohibited under the Chemical Weapons Convention, as evidenced in particular by reports of the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, and by a number of objective assessments by the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission that documented the facts surrounding the use of chemical weapons in Syria, namely the instances in the town of Marea on 1 and 3 September 2015.

Therefore, contrary to what the OPCW Director General claims about conditions being conducive to the swift closure of the Syrian file, we note that in the current environment it seems to be an extremely complicated formula, with many variables. In addition, I reiterate that the OPCW Technical Secretariat has tarnished its reputation in the eyes of the entire developing world, owing to its inappropriate political games and machinations. The situation is going to become even more complicated if further groundless accusations are levelled against the former Syrian Government. In these circumstances, we strongly recommend that Mr. Arias and

his team focus their efforts on examining existing data and facts, and on conducting subsequent professional investigations in order to resolve the outstanding issues.

We call on our colleagues on the Security Council to fully take into consideration the peculiarities of the domestic political situation in Syria when deciding on approaches to dealing with the Syrian chemical file. Syria is currently confronting a whole host of existential problems — the country is struggling to preserve its sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and unity. It needs to ensure national reconciliation, to establish State structures, to prepare for and hold general elections, to restore the State's monopoly on the use of force, and to address the threats emanating from terrorist groups.

Over the last few days, we have received very alarming news from Syria, indicating that the stabilization of the country is still far from secure. It is clear that, under these circumstances, verifying information about the presence or absence of chemical weapons is not a top priority for the current Syrian authorities. We need to understand that and not to push ahead with this topic.

Mr. Akram (Pakistan): We would like to thank High Representative Izumi Nakamitsu for her briefing, and we welcome the participation of the Permanent Representatives of the Syrian Arab Republic and Türkiye in this meeting.

Pakistan condemns the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere, under any circumstances. We consider the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) to be a pillar of global arms control and disarmament. Pakistan remains committed to advancing the objectives of the Chemical Weapons Convention and upholding the effectiveness and impartiality of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the protection of its verification mechanisms. We support continued efforts for universal adherence to the CWC and its full, effective and non-discriminatory implementation.

We support the stabilization of Syria through an inclusive, Syrian-owned and Syrian-led political process, facilitated by the United Nations. We must uphold Syria's unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity, and terrorism must not be allowed to re-emerge from Syria. Terrorists cannot be allowed to have access to weapons of mass destruction, including chemical weapons, in accordance with the provisions of resolution 1540 (2004).

On the issue of chemical weapons in Syria, I would like to make the following points.

First, we note the commitment of the Syrian interim authorities to secure suspected chemical weapons sites and their cooperation with the OPCW so far. The new Syrian authorities must address long-standing questions and ensure unimpeded access to enable independent and full verification by the OPCW of the elimination of chemical weapons in Syria, and any threats of proliferation, in compliance with the CWC.

Secondly, we commend the Director General of the OPCW's engagement with the Syrian caretaker authorities to implement the mandate of Security Council resolutions. In that regard, we appreciate the Director General's recent visit to Damascus. His efforts have the potential to open a path for renewed, effective and sustained dialogue with the Syrian interim authorities. We welcome the discussions between the Syrian focal point and the OPCW, and the impending physical presence of the OPCW in Syria. All those efforts should be pursued in a transparent and equitable manner.

Thirdly, everyone should seize the present opportunity to address outstanding issues in Syria, including those relating to chemical weapons. We stress the importance of continued dialogue, cooperation and full compliance with the CWC

and Security Council resolutions as a way forward to close the Syrian chemical weapons file as soon as possible.

Finally, we remain concerned about aspects of the situation in Syria, in particular the military occupation by Israel and its continuing strikes against Syrian sites and facilities. We urge members of the Council to maintain consensus and unity in addressing all the outstanding issues relating to Syria, the restoration of normalcy in Syria and the preservation of peace and security in the region.

Ms. Jurečko (Slovenia): I would like to thank High Representative Nakamitsu for her informative briefing.

Let me begin by reaffirming Slovenia's firm condemnation of the use of chemical weapons anywhere, by anyone, and under any circumstances, and our firm belief in the need for accountability for those who use them. The use of chemical weapons has always resulted in human tragedy. Nobody knows that more than the Syrian people, and, after all this time, justice has yet to be served. What is more, many questions about the development, production, stockpiling and use of chemical weapons in Syria remain unanswered.

However, in the past few months, we have been witnessing a rapidly evolving political and security situation, which presents new opportunities. In that regard, Slovenia welcomes the recent visit to Damascus by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Director General and the Investigation and Identification Team.

Slovenia remains concerned about the accuracy and completeness of the information about the Syrian chemical weapons programme submitted so far. We are especially concerned with the possibility that undeclared chemical weapons production sites may still exist in the country.

However, after all the developments in recent months, Slovenia is pleased that an avenue towards Syria's full compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention is finally opening up. We particularly welcome the participation of the Syrian interim Foreign Minister, Mr. Asaad Al-Shaibani, at the OPCW meeting held at The Hague earlier this week, at which he confirmed his commitment to relevant international norms and to dismantling the remaining stockpiles of chemical weapons in Syria. We encourage the Syrian authorities to seize the historic momentum and fully cooperate with the OPCW to swiftly address the unresolved questions under Syria's initial declaration.

Slovenia expresses once again its steadfast support for the work of the OPCW, including its nine-point action plan for Syria. We are confident that only a multilateral approach with the Convention and the OPCW as its cornerstones can prevent the further use of chemical weapons and bring to justice those responsible for carrying out attacks with such weapons in Syria and elsewhere.

Mr. Alfaro de Alba (Panama) (*spoke in Spanish*): Panama wishes to thank Mrs. Izumi Nakamitsu, the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, for presenting the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013) (see S/2025/127) and for the most recent update from the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) on the situation in Syria.

We take note of the developments reported to date, which can be regarded as significant steps in the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013) and the fulfilment of Syria's international commitments. That notwithstanding, today's report reminds us that, more than a decade after Syria's accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention, there are outstanding issues surrounding its initial declaration, which underscore the importance of making further progress in the full implementation of its disarmament commitments. We remain concerned that some aspects remain to

be clarified as regards chemical warfare agents and munitions and sites that require verification. Panama expresses its concern at the imminent risk of the proliferation of chemical weapons in a situation that continues to be marked by political instability and the presence of non-State actors in Syria and the region.

The OPCW Director General's visit to Damascus in early February, and the recent statement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Syria at The Hague this week, in which he pledged to destroy the chemical weapons stockpiles accumulated during the previous regime, bode well for the resumption of dialogue and represent an opportunity that must not be squandered. To that end, continued and effective cooperation with the OPCW is key to ensuring the transparency and credibility of the process. Panama reaffirms its support for the endeavours of the OPCW and for the integrity of the international regime against chemical weapons. We acknowledge the commitment and professionalism of the Technical Secretariat's specialized teams, who have worked in perilous conditions to fulfil their mandate. We echo the appeal made by Mrs. Nakamitsu in December 2024 (see S/PV.9800). The unity of the international community in the fight against chemical weapons and in promoting a world that is free of them is of the utmost importance.

That oversight is all the more relevant in the current context in Syria. The country is undergoing a new phase of political transition, involving efforts to rebuild institutions and reinstate the rule of law. Nonetheless, the upsurge in fighting and tensions in various parts of the country is a matter of profound concern. We urge all parties to end the escalation and to prioritize dialogue and stability as fundamental pillars for peace and national reconciliation.

In that regard, Panama welcomes the recent formation of a committee to draft a constitutional declaration and the efforts being pursued within the framework of the National Dialogue Conference. It is undoubtedly positive that the process places an emphasis on inclusion and the rule of law, as reflected in the participation by various sectors of society, including academics, constitutional lawyers and women, in crafting the new regulatory framework. If those gains are to be lasting, it is important that the disarmament process move in lockstep with efforts concerning the country's governance and security.

Panama commends the willingness of the new Syrian authorities to continue cooperating with the OPCW and to forge ahead with the fulfilment of their obligations. The complete eradication of those weapons is paramount not only to ensuring a stable transition but also to averting further risks, including the threat of terrorism, which continues to pose a challenge. Syria now has the opportunity to build on its commitment to international peace and security. Those efforts have the potential to reaffirm Syria's role as an actor committed to disarmament and to a future of stability and development for its people.

Mr. Eckersley (United Kingdom): I thank the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs for her very helpful briefing.

The last time that the Security Council met to discuss chemical weapons in Syria (see S/PV.9800), Bashar Al-Assad was still in power. Two days later, he fled, and his brutal regime was overthrown. The fall of Al-Assad marks a new chapter for Syria and presents a golden opportunity to destroy his remaining chemical weapons programme, verified by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). However, the situation in Syria is fragile, and we must make sure that we seize this window of opportunity to remove the threat posed by those weapons once and for all.

The United Kingdom is concerned about recent clashes in Syria, which must not be allowed to escalate into wider violence. We urge all parties to refrain from further violence and exercise restraint at this critical time. The OPCW Director General's

visit to Damascus on 8 February was an important step forward, and we are greatly encouraged by the commitments already made by the Syrian interim authorities to fully cooperate with the OPCW and to secure chemical weapons sites.

The attendance of Syria's interim Foreign Minister at the OPCW's Executive Council this week was a very significant moment. We welcome his renewed commitments on chemical weapons, including "to put an end to this painful legacy and ensure Syria becomes a nation aligned with international norms". The next step is to support Syria in meeting its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention, including the declaration and destruction of remaining chemical weapons stockpiles in cooperation with the OPCW. The OPCW Director General set out the scale of the challenge that lies ahead to the OPCW's Executive Council this week, and the Security Council has an important role to play in supporting the OPCW's work.

First, we underscore the importance of the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention alongside the full implementation of resolution 2118 (2013).

Secondly, the international community must provide the OPCW with the financial and technical assistance that it needs. The United Kingdom has committed more than \$1 million to the OPCW's Syria missions since the fall of Al-Assad to support its immediate work.

Lastly, as Syria's interim authorities seek to bring stability to the country and address security threats, it is vital that Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity be respected. That is why we urge Israel to de-escalate its actions in Syria. Such military action risks destabilizing an already fragile security situation. We call on all parties to provide safe conditions in which the OPCW can conduct its work.

With political will from the new authorities in Syria and the Council, there is an opportunity to deal with the issue once and for all and to finally achieve the total elimination of chemical weapons in Syria. We must take that opportunity.

Mr. Sekeris (Greece): I thank the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Mrs. Nakamitsu, for her informative briefing and commend her for her overall work.

At the outset, I wish to express my country's deepest appreciation for the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and its efforts to carry out its mandate impartially, professionally and in adherence to the highest international standards, with the aim of establishing the facts surrounding any use of chemical weapons, including toxic chemicals, for hostile purposes in the Syrian Arab Republic.

As a country with deep historical and political ties to Syria, Greece will support a full, inclusive Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political transition in the spirit of resolution 2254 (2015). Security and prosperity in Syria and its adherence to international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, are of key importance for regional stability throughout the Middle East. Therefore, we strongly support the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria. We call upon the Council to make use of the momentum created in order to push for substantial progress on the file concerning chemical weapons in Syria for the first time in many years. We cannot overemphasize, as a priority matter, the importance of securing chemical weapons-related locations and the materials therein during the transition period.

I would like to highlight three areas of importance for my country.

First, we welcome the recent visit of the Director General of OPCW to Syria as a crucial first step towards re-establishing mutual trust and cooperation between the Organization and the de facto authorities of Syria. We also welcome the recent visit to OPCW by the Syrian caretaker Foreign Minister Mr. Al-Shaibani and his commitment to working to eliminate the remaining chemical weapons in his

country. We encourage Syria to engage constructively and in good faith with the OPCW Technical Secretariat in order to close the 19 outstanding issues and thereby confirm that it has abandoned the use of chemical weapons and has concluded the total destruction of the stockpiles. Those are sine qua non conditions in order for Syria to regain its rights and privileges as a State party to the Chemical Weapons Convention without further delay.

Secondly, the latest monthly reports of the Director General of OPCW attest to slow progress towards the elimination of Syria's chemical weapons programme. Among others, it is highlighted that, owing to the continuously evolving situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, no monthly report was received recently from the Syrian Arab Republic regarding activities on its territory related to the destruction of its chemical weapons.

Thirdly, Greece condemns in the strongest possible terms any use of chemical weapons by any State or non-State actors, anywhere and in any circumstances, and it stresses the need to hold accountable all those who would use such weapons. In that vein, we support the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission's continued study of all available information related to repeated allegations of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic, as an effective means towards the establishment of accountability by the competent teams of the OPCW.

In conclusion, Greece calls for unity in the Council in upholding resolution 2118 (2013) and the international norm against any use of chemical weapons.

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

China's position on chemical weapons has been consistent. We firmly oppose the use of chemical weapons by anyone, under any circumstances and for any purpose. It is our hope that a world free of chemical weapons will arrive at an early date.

Regarding the Syrian chemical weapons issue, the Security Council has unanimously adopted resolution 2118 (2013), setting out the overarching objectives for the destruction of Syrian chemical weapons. That was followed by international cooperation to advance the verification of chemical weapons and the removal and destruction thereof. Positive progress has already been made. Regrettably, owing to political factors, such cooperation was not sustained.

The current situation in Syria has changed significantly. Under the new circumstances, there is a need to completely and thoroughly resolve the outstanding issues of Syrian chemical weapons and to close the file at an early date. That should be the basic consensus and priority of the international community. Within Syria, there are still terrorist organizations and individuals designated by the Security Council, and the risk of terrorist forces exploiting the chaos to expand positions in the country remains very high. Effectively resolving the Syrian chemical weapons issue will, in turn, help to prevent dangerous chemicals and chemical weapons from falling into the hands of terrorists.

Syria is a State party to the Chemical Weapons Convention. The turn of events inside Syria, however they may evolve, does not affect the country's legal obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention. Under the Convention, Syria undertakes not to use, develop, produce, otherwise acquire, stockpile, retain or transfer chemical weapons, and Syria should destroy any chemical weapons production facilities that it owns or possesses or that are located in any place under its jurisdiction or control.

China notes the recent interactions between the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Technical Secretariat and the Syrian authorities, and we welcome the OPCW Director General's visit to Damascus. We support the OPCW in fulfilling its mandate, in accordance with the Convention, and we encourage the

Technical Secretariat to engage in scientific, open and transparent cooperation with the Syrian authorities. All parties should work together to safeguard the technical nature of the OPCW and avoid politicizing relevant issues.

In conclusion, China condemns the recent massive air strikes by Israel against Syria. That not only violates Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity but also results in negative implications on the efforts to resolve the Syrian chemical weapons issue.

Mr. Bendjama (Algeria): I have the honour to deliver this joint statement on behalf of the three African members of the Security Council plus (A3+), namely, Guyana, Sierra Leone, Somalia and my own country, Algeria.

We thank Mrs. Izumi Nakamitsu, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, for the briefing, and we welcome the participation in this meeting of the representatives of the Syrian Arab Republic and Türkiye.

We reaffirm our unwavering commitment to achieving all the objectives of the Chemical Weapons Convention and underline the importance for all States parties to continue to ensure the full, effective and non-discriminatory implementation of the Convention. While bearing in mind that the threat or the use of chemical weapons remains relevant in the international arena, the A3+ reiterates its firm belief that the use of chemical weapons anywhere, by anyone and under any circumstances must be condemned.

We take note of the most recent monthly reports, which highlighted the progress achieved on the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013) and the relevant decisions of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) policymaking organs in relation to the elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme. The A3+ acknowledges the recent engagement between the OPCW and the Syrian Arab Republic, as highlighted in the recent reports. In that regard, we took note of the Director General's visit to Damascus with a high-level delegation, during which he met with the new Syrian President and the Foreign Minister.

Our group welcomes the designation by the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs of a new focal point for chemical weapons matters, which constitutes an additional positive step towards facilitating cooperation between the Syrian authorities and the OPCW. The A3+ acknowledges that Qatar, after close consultation and coordination with the Director General, has agreed to represent the interests of the Syrian Arab Republic before the OPCW until further notice. We commend Qatar's instrumental role as a revitalizing channel for engagement and opening further prospects for cooperation. We also welcome the participation of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic in the 108th session of the OPCW Executive Council, held at The Hague this month. We believe that those recent and positive developments can set the stage for the OPCW and Syrian authorities to work together in an open, transparent and constructive manner towards definitively closing the Syrian chemical weapons file and achieving the Convention's core objectives. In that regard, the A3+ calls on all actors to respect and uphold Syria's unity, independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The A3+ acknowledges the challenges faced by the Declaration Assessment Team in addressing all outstanding issues. We welcome the readiness of the new Syrian leadership to inaugurate a new chapter of open and transparent relations with the OPCW with a view to settling all unresolved issues involving quantities of potentially undeclared or unverified chemical warfare agents and chemical munitions, which remains a matter of concern. The A3+ welcomes the efforts of the OPCW to maintain engagement with the Syrian authorities and foster conditions for the eventual resumption of the OPCW mission in the Syrian Arab Republic. We also welcome the OPCW Technical Secretariat's nine-point action plan for the

Syrian Arab Republic. The A3+ notes the Technical Secretariat's view that the current political situation in the Syrian Arab Republic presents an opportunity to obtain clarifications on the full extent and scope of the Syrian chemical-weapons programme and to ensure compliance with the Convention. We encourage continued dialogue between the OPCW and the Syrian Arab Republic on all outstanding issues and look forward to greater cooperation between the OPCW and the Syrian Arab Republic to resolve outstanding issues and permanently close the file.

Mr. Dharmadhikari (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Mrs. Izumi Nakamitsu, for her briefing, and I will make three points.

First of all, since December 2024, Syria has entered a historic transition phase. France supports a transition process that will make it possible to build a free, united, sovereign and inclusive Syria, in the spirit of the fundamental principles of resolution 2254 (2015). On 13 February, we hosted a ministerial conference in Paris to mobilize the international community, in the presence of Mr. Geir Pedersen and Mr. Asaad Al-Shaibani.

Secondly, the political transition in Syria offers a historic opportunity to make progress towards eliminating the country's chemical weapons programme. The ousted regime of Bashar Al-Assad had used those inhumane weapons against its own population in at least nine cases documented by independent investigations. Syria joined the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) in 2013. However, for more than 11 years, the Al-Assad regime obstructed the conduct of the work of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). The initial declaration of the Syrian authorities at the time cannot be considered accurate or complete in the light of the requirements of the Convention. The latest OPCW reports indicate 19 outstanding issues, which are cause for serious concern. They relate, for instance, to stockpiles of chemical weapons, the destruction of which has not been verified with certainty. The risk of chemical weapons or their means of delivery being released and falling into the hands of non-State actors poses an immediate threat to international peace and security.

Thirdly, it is imperative to achieve the security and rapid and verified destruction of Syria's chemical weapons stockpiles, as affirmed in the declaration of the Paris ministerial conference of 13 February. We welcome the commitment of the Syrian transitional authorities in that regard and reiterate our support for the work of the OPCW to address those uncertainties and respond to the urgency of the situation. We welcome the visit to Damascus on 8 February by the Director General of the OPCW, accompanied by members of the Declaration Assessment Team, the Fact-Finding Mission and the Investigation and Identification Team. We also welcome the participation of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Syria in the 108th session of the OPCW Executive Council this week at The Hague. Those exchanges have led to concrete changes. We welcome the deployment, in the coming days, of the Declaration Assessment Team in Syria in order to support the Syrian transitional authorities in drafting an initial declaration that is finally sincere and comprehensive.

By fulfilling its obligations under the CWC, Syria will be able to recover its rights and privileges as a State party, which were suspended in 2021. Along with its partners, France remains committed to supporting the work of the OPCW, while ensuring compliance with the norm prohibiting chemical weapons and ensuring that the use of such weapons does not go unpunished.

Mr. Hwang (Republic of Korea): I would like to express my gratitude to Under-Secretary-General Izumi Nakamitsu for her informative briefing.

Last December (see S/PV.9800), we expressed our hope that the historic momentum would be consolidated to ensure the complete destruction of chemical

weapons in Syria and accountability for their past use. Recent developments between the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the Syrian caretaker authorities align with that aspiration. However, internal and regional instability remain as potential obstacles. Let me make the following points in that regard.

First, we welcome the progress made between the Syrian authorities and the OPCW in the previous reporting period. The visit of the OPCW Director General to Syria last month, along with the briefing by the caretaker Minister for Foreign Affairs to the OPCW Executive Council on Wednesday, demonstrated Syria's commitment to the full implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). The Syrian authorities' pledge to cooperate on the OPCW's nine-point action plan was followed by the designation of a point of contact — a meaningful first step in the right direction. We look forward to sustained cooperation and tangible progress.

Secondly, all regional actors must refrain from actions that could impede Syria's full implementation of its CWC obligations. While we now have a unique opportunity to address this long-standing issue, recent security developments on the ground risk undermining such efforts. In that connection, we note the OPCW Director General's concern that Israel's air strikes could not only create a risk of contamination but also lead to the destruction of valuable evidence for investigations related to past use of chemical weapons.

Thirdly, accountability must remain a guiding priority. Beyond the complete destruction of chemical weapons, broader accountability measures must be pursued as part of Syria's political transition. In that regard, the Republic of Korea reaffirms its support for the OPCW Syria teams, including the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) and the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT). Recent developments do not absolve those responsible for the horrific use of chemical weapons from accountability. We welcome Mr. Al-Sharaa's commitment in providing full support and unfettered access for the investigations conducted by the FFM and the IIT. In particular, we welcome the decision to grant the IIT access to Syria for the first time since its inception in 2018.

Syria is now at a critical juncture in its history as it undergoes significant transitions, including the launch of the National Dialogue Conference and the formation of the Constitutional Committee in February. While the political transition may face uncertainties, the imperative to eliminate chemical weapons must not waver. The universal status of the CWC underscores that a world free of chemical weapons is essential for maintaining international security. In that light, we take this opportunity to urge the four remaining States not party to the Convention, including the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, to accede to the CWC without delay and without preconditions.

I would like to conclude my remarks by reiterating the importance of Syria's continued cooperation with the OPCW, in accordance with the nine-point action plan.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Denmark.

Let me first thank High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Nakamitsu for her very timely and informative briefing. I welcome the representatives of the Syrian Arab Republic and Türkiye in today's meeting.

Today we discuss chemical weapons in Syria for the first time since the fall of the Al-Assad regime. After years of deadlock, we can now approach this file with a newfound optimism. Now is the time to engage actively and constructively to finally free Syria from those atrocious weapons, weapons that have tragically killed and injured far too many Syrians.

Denmark welcomes signals that the interim Government is committed to destroying all chemical weapons in Syria. As we heard this morning from the High Representative, that was reiterated in Syria's Foreign Minister's message to the Executive Council of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) at The Hague, earlier this week. We strongly support that commitment and acknowledge the special role of the OPCW. In that regard, we acknowledge the invaluable role of Qatar in assisting the Syrian mission to the OPCW over the past months and facilitating the first visit of the OPCW Director General to Syria after the fall of Al-Assad.

However, we should not underestimate the scale of the task ahead for the OPCW. More than 100 sites still need to be inspected. That will stretch the OPCW's already limited resources. We urge all donors to scale up support for the OPCW — both financially and operationally — in order to rapidly close this file.

We urge the OPCW and Syria to continue and advance cooperation related to Syria's obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention and resolution 2118 (2013). Resolution 2118 (2013) is clear: all chemical weapons-related locations must be secured, as must evidence of the crimes committed by the Al-Assad regime. The victims of the Al-Assad regime's horrific chemical attacks have waited years for justice. Now is the time to show that we have not forgotten them. There can be no impunity for the perpetrators of those attacks.

As a new day dawns in Syria, it is important that those weapons do not fall into the hands of terrorist groups, such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. We must all work to ensure that none of those dangerous agents are ever used again, by anyone, anywhere. The clashes reported in recent days in north-eastern Syria are worrisome, as are the continued incursions and attacks by the Israel Defense Forces. We reiterate the importance of maintaining Syria's security, independence and territorial integrity. Syria needs stability now more than ever.

In conclusion, we have an opportunity now to make real progress; to destroy the remaining chemical weapons in Syria; to uphold the obligations of the Chemical Weapons Convention; to support the vital work of the OPCW, in words and in deeds; and to ensure accountability for the crimes committed. It is incumbent upon all of us around this table, individually and collectively, to grasp it. The Council can count on Denmark's full support to that end.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

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

Mr. Aldahhak (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I congratulate you and Denmark, Madam President, on presiding over the Security Council this month, and I wish you every success in your endeavour. Syria stands ready to support your efforts. Please allow me to thank the permanent delegation of the People's Republic of China for successfully presiding over the Security Council last month. Needless to say, I thank Mrs. Nakamitsu, Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, for her briefing and for the constructive dialogue we had a few days ago.

The Syrian Arab Republic is keen to adopt a new foreign policy grounded in international law and the Charter of the United Nations and to honour its obligations under the international legal instruments to which it has acceded. The Syrian Arab Republic therefore reiterates its unwavering commitment to cooperate with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). To that end, the Syrian Government has opened a new chapter with the OPCW, one marked by openness, transparency and constructive cooperation, which helps to resolve all

outstanding issues, ensure the full elimination of any potential chemical weapons and close this file once and for all.

Israel's aggression against several military and civilian sites and facilities in Syria on 9 December 2024 complicated the relevant logistical, technical and practical challenges.

Syria reiterates its condemnation of the use of chemical weapons anywhere, at any time, by anyone, under any circumstances. As part of the new phase of cooperation with the OPCW, the OPCW Director General, Mr. Fernando Arias, and his delegation visited Damascus on 8 February. He held high-level meetings with the President of the Republic and the Foreign Minister. The talks during the visit were open and positive and featured a thorough exchange of views to establish new frameworks of bilateral cooperation. Discussions also addressed how to promote cooperation and coordination, including the support and expertise that the Technical Secretariat can provide to help Syria fulfil its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and restore relations based on mutual trust and transparency. Discussions will continue further within the framework of the OPCW, in the relevant international forum at The Hague.

The 108th session of the Executive Council of the OPCW was held over the past two days with the participation of the Foreign Minister, Mr. Asaad Al-Shaibani. That reflects Syria's interest and commitment to the CWC and its serious desire to honour its obligations under the Convention. In his address to the Executive Council, the Foreign Minister reiterated Syria's commitment to secure any chemical weapons-related materials that may be discovered, to ensure they do not fall into the wrong hands. He said that the chemical weapons programme and the use documented by the OPCW dated back to the era of the former regime. That means that the new Government inherited the legal obligations emanating from those violations and did not cause them.

As the Minister mentioned, despite the local and international challenges facing the Syrian Government, Syria cooperated with the OPCW and, in close partnership with the brotherly State of Qatar, was keen to bridge any gap in dealing with this sensitive file in the days that followed the fall of the regime. We are grateful to the State of Qatar.

The Minister briefed the Executive Council on the first visit of the OPCW Director General and the Investigation and Identification Team to Damascus. He outlined the steps that were taken immediately after the visit in order to implement the plan of action presented by the Director General. A national focal point, which was also designated, held initial meetings with representatives of the Technical Secretariat in order to develop a clear and specific plan of action. The Technical Secretariat has demonstrated its clear commitment and has provided significant technical support.

The new Syrian leadership has repeatedly reaffirmed Syria's full commitment to complying with the provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention and its keenness to seize the moment so as to engage in fruitful and constructive cooperation so as to mend the broken relationship with the OPCW, which had led to Syria's privileges and rights as a State party to the Convention being suspended and the imposition of measures of collective punishment that has limited its access to chemicals and has prevented it from pursuing economic development and from meeting the needs of its people, at a time when they are in dire need of the international community's support. Syria is now determined to eliminate the threat posed by prohibited chemical weapons and to promote regional and international peace, stability and security. Syria trusts that those decisions will be revoked, given that they belong to a bygone era.

We also look forward to the reinstatement of Syria's rights and obligations as a State party to the Convention. The sanctions that arose in the context of the imposition of unjust international measures on the Syrian people as a result of the former regime's practices constitute a major obstacle to Syria's recovery and, as indicated by the OPCW's leadership, affect the OPCW's ability to operate in Syria effectively, expeditiously and smoothly at the institutional level. Accordingly, they must be immediately lifted.

In conclusion, accountability is essential, and we value the efforts of the OPCW, the Joint Investigative Mechanism, the Fact-finding Mission, the Investigation and Identification Team and all other mechanisms seeking to hold those involved in the use of chemical weapons accountable. Syria will continue to strive to deliver justice for the victims and to establish robust international standards to prevent the future reoccurrence of such atrocities.

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

Mr. Yıldız (Türkiye): I also am grateful to High Representative Nakamitsu for the comprehensive and informative briefing.

The fall of the Al-Assad regime undoubtedly marks a new chapter in Syria. Türkiye welcomes the convening of the National Dialogue Conference and the establishment of an expert committee to draft a constitutional declaration. We believe that those steps will contribute to an inclusive and representative Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political transition. At this critical juncture, the tension in some parts of the country and the targeting of security forces could undermine efforts to lead Syria into the future in unity and solidarity.

Syria's new chapter also presents a historic opportunity for both the country and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to close the chemical weapons file once and for all. From the outset, Türkiye has conveyed the international community's concerns regarding the Al-Assad regime's chemical weapons programme to the new Syrian Administration. We welcome Syria's commitment to fulfilling its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention and to cooperating with the OPCW to ensure the complete removal of chemical weapons from the region. We also welcome the visit by OPCW Director General Arias to Damascus on 8 February, at the invitation of the Syrian Foreign Minister. That visit holds particular significance as it marks the first time that any Director General has visited Syria. The high-level discussions during the visit represent a crucial turning point in establishing direct cooperation between Syria and the OPCW, putting an end to years of stagnation.

Türkiye also welcomes the appointment of a focal point by the new Syrian Administration and the upcoming deployment of OPCW technical experts to Damascus. We commend the Syrian Foreign Minister's recent participation in the Executive Council at OPCW headquarters at The Hague. His historic address to that Council underscores Syria's commitment to eliminating the remnants of its chemical weapons and to seeking justice for the victims. Once again, that demonstrates that the new leadership is open to engagement and the suggestions of the international community. International support is crucial for the Administration in Damascus to develop the capacity needed to fulfil its commitments and ensure peace and stability in the country.

Therefore, we call on the international community to support the OPCW's Technical Secretariat and Syria in completing the destruction of remaining chemical weapons stocks. Türkiye stands ready to provide all necessary support in strengthening Syria's capacity to address the chemical weapons file. We are sure that cooperation between the OPCW and Syria will lead to success in fully dismantling the chemical weapons, fostering accountability and transparency and contributing to

regional stability. We also take this opportunity to commend the State of Qatar for temporarily assuming the role of representing Syria's interests at the OPCW.

The preservation of Syria's stability, sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity remains our utmost priority. At this critical juncture, it is more important than ever. Unfortunately, Syria continues to face challenges that violate those fundamental principles.

First, we condemn Israel's ongoing military advances into Syrian territory and call on the Council to take immediate and decisive action against Israel's expansionist and destabilizing acts, which are against all the rules to which we are committed.

Secondly, a stable and unified Syria requires the eradication of terrorism. There is no place for Da'esh, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)/People's Protection Units (YPG)/Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in Syria. The occupation of one third of Syrian territory by the PKK/YPG/SDF poses a serious threat to the country's territorial integrity. Eliminating those terrorist groups is a prerequisite for a peaceful, independent and unified Syria.

Türkiye strongly opposes the use of chemical weapons under any circumstances. We reiterate our support for the OPCW's efforts to ensure the full and effective implementation of the Convention. The international community's support remains vital for Syria to fulfil its commitments in all key areas, including the elimination of chemical weapons. Only through our collective efforts — including the full lifting of sanctions and support for the country's reconstruction — can we secure a stable, unified and peaceful Syria.

The President: There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion of the subject.

The meeting rose at 11.20 a.m.