



Security Council

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Letter dated 7 January 2021 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 the briefing provided by Mrs. Izumi Nakamitsu, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, as well as the statements delivered by the representatives of China, Estonia, France, India, Ireland, Kenya, Mexico, the Niger, Norway, the Russian Federation, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Tunisia, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America and Viet Nam in connection with the video-teleconference on “The situation in the Middle East (Syria)” convened on Tuesday, 5 January 2021. Statements were also delivered by the representatives of the Syrian Arab Republic and 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, these briefing and statements will be issued as an official document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Tarek **Ladeb**
President of the Security Council



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

I thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to brief the Security Council on the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013), on the elimination of the chemical weapons programme of the Syrian Arab Republic.

I also take this opportunity to welcome the new non-permanent members of the Council — India, Ireland, Kenya, Mexico and Norway. I look forward to working closely with all of them on this important issue.

Since my previous briefing, on 11 December 2020 (see S/2020/1202, annex I), the Office for Disarmament Affairs has continued to maintain regular contact with counterparts at the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) on its activities related to this matter. In addition, on 14, 18 and 28 December 2020, the Office for Disarmament Affairs received information from the Permanent Mission of the Syrian Arab Republic concerning chemical issues for this period. That information was studied carefully and was forwarded to the OPCW Technical Secretariat.

As I previously informed the Security Council, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic continues to affect the OPCW's ability to deploy to the Syrian Arab Republic. The Technical Secretariat has nevertheless 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 Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) is persevering in its efforts to clarify all outstanding issues regarding the Syrian Arab Republic's initial declaration to the OPCW. As reported by the OPCW Director-General during his briefing to the Security Council on 11 December 2020 (see S/2020/1202, annex II), while some progress was made during the most recent round of consultations with the Syrian National Authority, with three outstanding issues related to the Syrian initial declaration being closed, 19 issues remain outstanding. One of those outstanding issues pertains to a chemical weapons production facility declared by the Syrian National Authority as never having been used for the production of chemical weapons. However, the review of all the information and other materials gathered by the DAT since 2014 indicates that the production and/or weaponization of chemical warfare nerve agents took place at that facility. The OPCW Technical Secretariat therefore requested that the Syrian Arab Republic declare the exact types and quantities of chemical agents produced and/or weaponized at the site. I understand from the OPCW Technical Secretariat that the Syrian Arab Republic has yet to respond to that request.

Consequently, the OPCW Technical Secretariat continues to assess that at this stage, due to the identified gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies that remain unresolved, the declaration submitted by the Syrian Arab Republic cannot be considered accurate and complete in accordance with the Chemical Weapons Convention. I take this opportunity to reiterate that until those 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 outcome of the seventh round of inspections conducted by the OPCW Technical Secretariat at the Barzah and Jamrayah facilities of the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Centre (SSRC) in November will be reported to the OPCW Executive Council in due course.

I also understand that the Syrian Arab Republic has yet to provide sufficient technical information or explanations that would enable the OPCW Technical Secretariat to close the issue related to the finding of a Schedule 2 chemical detected at the Barzah facilities of the SSRC during the third round of inspections held in 2018.

I note that the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) is still 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 Chemical Weapons Convention with regard to a variety of incidents. As previously reported, further FFM deployments will be subject to the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Investigation and Identification Team continues its investigations into incidents in which the FFM has determined that chemical weapons were used or likely used in the Syrian Arab Republic, and it will issue further reports in due course.

I take this opportunity to once again reiterate my full support for the integrity, professionalism, impartiality, objectivity and independence of the work of the OPCW.

With regard to the inspections mandated by paragraph 8 of OPCW Executive Council decision EC-94/DEC.2, entitled “Addressing the Possession and Use of Chemical Weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic” (see S/2020/724), the OPCW Technical Secretariat is monitoring the current situation and will inform the Syrian Arab Republic when it is prepared to deploy for that purpose.

It cannot be repeated often enough: there is no justification for the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere and under any circumstances. The use of such weapons with impunity and without accountability is a threat to international peace and security and a danger to us all. It is therefore imperative to hold accountable all those who have used chemical weapons. As we start the new year, I state my sincere hope once again that 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.

Before concluding, I wish to echo the Secretary-General’s New Year message:

“Together, let’s make peace among ourselves and with nature, tackle the climate crisis, stop the spread of COVID-19 and make 2021 a year of healing.”

Annex II**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations, Dai Bing**

[Original: Chinese]

As this is the first open meeting of the Security Council in 2021, I would like to welcome our five new members — India, Ireland, Kenya, Mexico and Norway — to the Council. We look forward to all Council members working together to start a new chapter of solidarity and cooperation in 2021 in order to fulfil our important collective responsibility mandated by the Charter of the United Nations. I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate Tunisia on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month. We pledge our full support for the work of the Tunisian delegation.

I thank Mrs. Nakamitsu for her briefing on the Syrian chemical weapons issue (annex I). China's position on the issue of chemical weapons has been consistent from the start. We oppose the use of chemical weapons by any country, entity or individual under any circumstances and for any purpose. Allegations of the use of chemical weapons must be investigated and dealt with in an impartial and objective manner on the basis of factual evidence and the provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC).

China notes that Syria has on many occasions expressed its strong willingness to cooperate with the Technical Secretariat and, through consultations, the two parties have closed three outstanding issues related to the initial declaration. Syria's constructive attitude and the results of the engagement between the two parties deserve our recognition. We encourage them to continue to work to achieve positive progress on the other outstanding issues. The Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic has addressed many letters to the President of the Security Council, with detailed information on terrorist organizations planning staged chemical weapon attacks. That information warrants the Council's full attention. China hopes that follow-up to such information will be provided in the monthly reports and briefings of the Council.

I would also like to point out that Syria is a State Member of the United Nations and that the Syrian Government is the legal Government. It is not the so-called regime. That constitutes basic respect for a State Member of the United Nations.

Given the crucial importance of the chemical weapons dossier, the issue of accountability must be brought back within the framework of the CWC. Investigations must be based on respect for facts and science. We oppose taking action with undue haste when there is no conclusive evidence and question marks abound with regard to the reports. We hope that the reports of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) are able to establish a complete chain of evidence with no loose ends, failing which the objectivity, neutrality and authority of the OPCW would be called into question. Given that the reports are full of controversy and the parties remain sharply divided, forcing action is not the right thing to do at this point. The Technical Secretariat should encourage in-depth discussions on the questionable points regarding the reports so as to convince each other with science-based analysis and factual information. That is the only way to fully implement resolution 2118 (2013) and preserve the authority of the OPCW.

Currently, we are witnessing the OPCW face challenges in its work and sharp division and confrontation among the parties. Last month, Director-General Arias indicated that he was in close contact with member States (see S/2020/1202, annex II). We encourage the Director-General and the Technical Secretariat to step up their

efforts to help bring States parties back to the tradition of consensus-based decision-making and avoid forcing a vote. We also look forward to Director-General Arias briefing the Security Council at its open meetings and answering the questions of Council members.

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

Allow me to congratulate you, Mr. President, on assuming the Security Council presidency for this month. I also wish the new elected members — India, Ireland, Kenya, Mexico and Norway — a very warm welcome. We look forward to working with them.

I thank High Representative Izumi Nakamitsu for her briefing (annex I). Despite the lack of progress on this file, we highly appreciate her joining us every month with a very important message. As she did today, she reminds the Council, normally in concluding her briefing, that the use of chemical weapons is intolerable and a serious violation of international law and that it is imperative that those who use, or have used, chemical weapons be identified and held accountable.

That reminder should actually be superfluous. I doubt that there is anyone on the Council who would disagree with the High Representative. The Security Council confirmed that position in resolution 2118 (2013) and, most recently, in presidential statement S/PRST/2019/14, of November 2019. Many of us emphasize those same views in our statements. Yet, regrettably, the gap has been widening with respect to the values, norms and commitments upon which the Security Council has agreed and the way in which it upholds them.

With regard to accountability, resolution 2118 (2013) clearly states that those individuals responsible for the use of chemical weapons must be held accountable. In the face of clear evidence of the use of chemical weapons, the Security Council has an obligation to act and respond decisively. The evidence exists. Consistent, science-based, solid evidence that the Syrian regime used chemical weapons against its own people on at least seven occasions has been provided by the best independent experts in that field — the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism and the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team. Yet all attempts within the Council to take action and move towards accountability were blocked by the Russian Federation, which dislikes the inconvenient outcomes of the reports and therefore cannot accept them.

In the presidential statement of 2019, the Security Council unanimously reaffirmed its strong support for the work of the OPCW. However, in practice, we hear from a Member State how the OPCW Technical Secretariat is exercising double standards, engages in political smear campaigns and manipulates and falsifies its reports. That is not constructive criticism to make an institution stronger but a concerted disinformation campaign to shield the crimes of the Al-Assad regime and undermine the prohibition of chemical weapons.

Resolution 2118 (2013) also stipulates that the Syrian Arab Republic shall cooperate fully with the OPCW. However, seven years and 87 monthly reports later, there are still 19 outstanding issues remaining with regard to the initial declaration. As we learn from the current Director-General's report (see S/2020/1300, annex), Syria has not responded to several requests from the OPCW for information regarding its chemical weapons production facilities. Syria has blatantly ignored the OPCW Executive Council decision of July 2020 (EC-94/DEC.2) and the Technical Secretariat's offers of assistance. But, instead of condemning such behaviour, we hear from some members of the Council encouragement to non-compliance. We hear how all the outstanding issues are basically fabricated and that the Executive Council sets Syria impossible and unrealistic demands.

The re-emergence of chemical weapons is one of the most urgent threats to international peace and security. Beyond their widespread use by the Syrian regime as a weapon of war to suppress the opposition and terrorize its people, chemical weapons were recently also used in assassination attempts. The use of Novichok in the United Kingdom in 2018 against the Skripals and last year in Russia against the opposition politician Alexei Navalny constitutes a violation of international law and poses a threat to international peace and security. We reiterate our call on Russia to investigate those crimes thoroughly and in full transparency, bearing in mind Russia's commitments under the Chemical Weapons Convention.

The Security Council has an obligation to address, and respond to, the use of chemical weapons given the threat that they pose to international peace and security. We hope that in 2021 the Security Council will not remain idle but will take action to uphold its resolutions, the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Charter of the United Nations. To echo Mrs. Nakamitsu, we hope that members of the Council will unite on this important issue.

Annex IV**Statement by the Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations, Nicolas de Rivière**

[Original: French]

I thank Mrs. Nakamitsu for her briefing.

Once again, no progress can be reported. However, simple steps could be taken, and they are the responsibility of the Syrian regime. The first of them is to shed light — at last — on the initial declaration.

How can it be explained that 19 issues remain unresolved seven years after the adoption of resolution 2118 (2013)? Above all, how can it be explained that new questions continue to be added to the old ones? The regime absolutely must shed light on the new, undeclared production site highlighted by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in November.

Contrary to what some people claim, that is entirely the responsibility of the regime. Indeed, last month's meeting with the Director-General (see S/2020/1202, annex II) shows that the OPCW is fully fulfilling its mandate. The OPCW works with complete professionalism and impartiality. Take the Fact-Finding Mission. When it is provided with robust and substantiated evidence, as it was in 2019 after the collection of dozens of testimonies and some 100 samples in connection with the allegations of attacks on Douma, it presents clear and irrefutable conclusions. On the other hand, where the evidence is insufficient, it does not hesitate to acknowledge that in full transparency. That methodology is a guarantee of credibility.

Secondly, the OPCW and its States parties are very consistent. The first report of the Investigation and Identification Team concluded unambiguously that the regime was responsible for three chemical-weapons attacks in March 2017 in Ltamenah. In response, the Executive Council adopted its July decision. It was on that basis that the Director-General produced his October report. The conclusion is, unfortunately, clear: Syria has taken absolutely no steps to try to comply. All this is perfectly coherent, and that is why France, on behalf of 46 delegations from four geographical groups, submitted a draft decision to the OPCW Technical Secretariat in November to take the necessary measures. That draft decision will be submitted to the second part of the session of the Conference of States Parties, to be held by next April.

Therefore, I can only deplore once again the false accusations made by those who seek to discredit the OPCW. The OPCW is not a "black box", there is no conspiracy, there is no pressure, there is no instrumentalization of the Secretariat. There is simply the reality of the facts. We all know them: the regime used weapons of war prohibited by international law against its own population, and since then we have seen chemical weapons re-emerge and become commonplace in Syria and elsewhere.

The fight against impunity and the total ban on the use of chemical weapons remain our priorities. That is the meaning of our continued mobilization, particularly within the International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons, which we launched, along with our partners, in 2018.

Annex V**Statement by the Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations, T. S. Tirumurti**

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

India appreciates the commitment of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Technical Secretariat in performing its responsibilities during these challenging times of the pandemic. We have taken note of the findings mentioned in the two recent reports of the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic.

We have also taken note of the fact that the OPCW is in the process of analysing the information collected from its most recent deployments for cases related to the alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria. We note with satisfaction that three issues relating to Syria's initial declaration were resolved during the past six months.

We encourage continued engagement and cooperation between Syria and the OPCW Technical Secretariat towards an early resolution of all outstanding issues. India has provided a financial contribution of \$1 million to the OPCW trust fund for activities relating to the destruction of chemical stockpiles and related facilities in Syria.

India attaches high importance to the Chemical Weapons Convention, which is a unique, non-discriminatory disarmament instrument and serves as a model for the elimination of an entire category of weapons of mass destruction. India has been firmly opposed to any use of chemical weapons anywhere, at any time, by anybody and under any circumstances. We strongly condemn the use of chemical weapons, and there can be no justification for their use. With regard to allegations of the use of chemical weapons in Syria and investigations conducted in that regard, India has consistently underlined the need for an impartial and objective investigation into any alleged use of chemical weapons, scrupulously following the provisions and procedures laid down in the Convention. Any concerns should be addressed on the basis of consultation among all concerned parties. In our view, politicization of the issue is neither helpful nor productive.

India remains concerned about the possibility of such weapons falling into the hands of terrorist organizations and individuals. Terrorist groups have taken advantage of the decade-long conflict in Syria to entrench themselves, posing a threat to the entire region. The world cannot afford to give those terrorists any sanctuary or dilute its fight against those terrorist groups.

India has consistently called for a comprehensive and peaceful resolution of the Syrian conflict through a Syrian-led dialogue, taking into account the legitimate aspirations of the people of Syria. We have also contributed to the return of normalcy and the rebuilding of Syria through humanitarian assistance and human resource development.

We also remain supportive of both the Geneva and the Astana processes for an expeditious resolution of the conflict in Syria.

Annex VI

Statement by the Permanent Representative of Ireland to the United Nations, Geraldine Byrne Nason

I thank you very much indeed, Mr. President, and I offer you congratulations on assuming your presidency. You know that you will have the full support of the Irish delegation throughout your month and an excellent programme of work. I can say also that we are thrilled, as a new member, to take up our position here as an elected Security Council member.

I also thank Under-Secretary-General Nakamitsu very much for her excellent briefing.

We know that the Council addresses this subject every month, and some of the arguments we have already heard, indeed, they may be ones that we feel we know. But I want to say for the first time at the Council table that Ireland regards this as a really important debate.

My country unequivocally condemns any use of chemical weapons at any time, anywhere, under any circumstance. We find that the marked increase in the use of chemical weapons in recent years is deeply disturbing. This shows for us that the framework against the use of those deadly weapons may well be under threat, and I think that every one of us sitting here today in this meeting has a responsibility to address that threat.

The Council must be clear on the need to ensure accountability and put an end to impunity in the use of those appalling weapons at any time, anywhere. Ireland certainly will work tirelessly with our Council colleagues to do that.

The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), given its diligence, impartiality and professional analysis, is crucial. We find that is truer now than ever.

As Director-General Arias made clear to the Council last month (see S/2020/1202, annex II), the OPCW Technical Secretariat has spared no effort over seven long years to assess Syria's initial declaration and to assist Syria to complete it. We find it deeply disturbing that, after seven long years of effort, it is still not possible to assess Syria's initial declaration as either accurate or complete, given that there are gaps and inconsistencies in Syria's account of its chemical-weapons programme. Ireland fully supports the work of the Declaration Assessment Team, the Fact-Finding Mission and the Investigation and Identification Team in addressing chemical weapons and their use in Syria.

I want to be clear today that the problems in the initial declaration are not a minor issue, as some would portray it. Over those seven years, the number of issues that need to be addressed has expanded from five to 19. There have been 17 amendments to Syria's declaration, including the addition of a production facility and four research and development centres, and a doubling of the amount of declared agents and chemicals. There are also issues relating to hundreds of tons of missing agents and munitions reported destroyed prior to accession, which still cannot be verified. As the most recent reports have set out, there is also another issue related to a production facility, declared as never having been used, where there is clear evidence to the contrary.

Since Syria's initial declaration, the Fact-Finding Mission and the Joint Investigative Mechanism have investigated and reported on the use of chemical weapons in Syria on numerous occasions. The Mechanism and now the Investigation

and Identification Team have attributed responsibility for use of chemical weapons in some instances to the Syrian authorities.

For Ireland, all of this makes clear the ever more urgent need to fully resolve remaining issues. Only the OPCW, in our view, has the expertise to do this. And in this, we know that we are in good hands.

As Director-General Arias set out last month, OPCW investigation teams are made up of highly qualified experts in their own field who can independently assess, analyse and cross-check information that they have independently collected, as well as that which they receive from numerous sources, including the Syrian Government. That is done to ensure the strongest grounds for any conclusion reached.

The OPCW Executive Council in July made clear the actions that Syria needs to take to return to full compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention. Ireland co-sponsored that decision. We deeply regret Syria's lack of any real and meaningful response to that request.

In April, the Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention will meet in The Hague. States parties will then have to decide on the necessary course of action. Ireland will support the use of all measures available under the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) to ensure Syria's compliance. Ireland also strongly supports the European Union's chemical-weapons sanctions regime, which includes listings related to chemical-weapons use in Syria.

Let us be clear. Syria's own actions have brought us to this point, and the Syrian authorities have the responsibility to act immediately to meet their obligations under the CWC. As a State party to the Convention, we believe that Syria is bound to eliminate, in its entirety, its chemical-weapons programme and to cooperate actively, openly and in good faith with the Technical Secretariat of the OPCW.

In concluding, I can only echo the heartfelt and sincere sentiments expressed by the High Representative, at the end of her remarks this morning, that we start 2021 on a more hopeful note.

Annex VII

Statement by the Permanent Representative of Kenya to the United Nations, Martin Kimani

Allow me to thank Mrs. Izumi Nakamitsu, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, for her comprehensive briefing.

I affirm Kenya's support for the mandate of the OPCW and its responsibility for the full implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention. We condemn any use of chemical weapons, for any purpose and under any circumstances.

So serious and important is projecting that principle for the sake of global security that all allegations of the use of chemical weapons require thorough and transparent investigation. The results should be objective and seen to be objective by all reasonable parties. They should be able to withstand the rigorous scrutiny that will be the basis for their gaining widespread credibility.

We take note of the fact that the Syrian Arab Republic has continued to cooperate with the OPCW, as evidenced by the submission of its eighty-fifth report to the OPCW. On the 19 identified gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies that remain unresolved, Syria should continue to work with the OPCW to come to a solution and conclusion to the investigations.

From the ravages of terrorism to the politicization of counter-terrorism by multiple actors, and the multiple claims of chemical-weapons use, Syria is both a victim and a symbol of a global order under immense strain from unilateralism, power politics and war without limit.

As entrenched as the positions of the major parties to the conflict have been, Kenya believes that it is still possible for the Security Council to pull together. The basis for renewing our appetite for collaboration is that it is in the interest of all members, permanent and elected, to show the world that the Security Council can still deliver in the most difficult of circumstances.

Such a fulfilment of its core mandate would, in Kenya's judgment, lead to the Council's support for a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned dialogue that incorporates all actors committed to security and opposed to terrorist violence as a means to promote political aims.

We stand with the people of Syria in this aspiration for an inclusive dialogue focused primarily on their needs, their lives and their longer-term peace.

Annex VIII**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Mexico to the United Nations, Juan Ramón de la Fuente Ramírez**

[Original: Spanish]

We congratulate Tunisia on having assumed the presidency in January, and I reiterate the full support of my delegation.

We are grateful for the kind expressions of welcome that we have received, and we extend our appreciation to Mrs. Nakamitsu, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, for the work that her Office does to keep the Security Council updated. We have taken note of her presentation and of the report of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

Mexico condemns in the strongest terms the use of any weapon of mass destruction, including, of course, chemical weapons, by any actor, in any place and under any circumstance. The use of this type of weapon is a crime and a serious violation of international law and international humanitarian law.

That is why the Chemical Weapons Convention is an example of effective multilateralism, and it is precisely because of Mexico's commitment to multilateralism that we support the work of the OPCW. The States parties to the Convention are obliged to defend its integrity and demand compliance with it, including the decisions of its governing bodies.

Mexico has full confidence in the professionalism of the OPCW and has collaborated with the organization through its Executive Council, practically since the adoption of the Convention. Indeed, it assumed the presidency of the twenty-fifth Conference of the States Parties.

Resolving the outstanding issues surrounding the incidents in Syria is crucial. We therefore welcome the recent progress in cooperation between that country and the OPCW, which, although modest, clarifies three of the outstanding issues in Syria's initial declaration. Mexico hopes that the rounds between the OPCW Declaration Assessment Group and the Syrian authorities will continue to clarify the prevailing inconsistencies in the initial declaration of the Syrian Arab Republic, as shown in the most recent report of the Director-General of that organization (see S/2020/1300, annex).

My country awaits the results of the investigations of the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism, while following with interest the activities of the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic as well as those of the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team, which deals with incidents involving alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria. Mexico strongly calls for the full cooperation of the Government in Damascus and other actors so that those bodies can continue their work and submit their respective reports to the Security Council. We remain equally attentive to the carrying out of the mandated inspections by the OPCW Technical Secretariat.

My country reaffirms the importance of Syria's compliance with all the provisions of the OPCW and with its obligations as a State party. Mexico trusts that the Syrian authorities will clarify the remaining inaccuracies in the initial declaration and that they will facilitate access for the Fact-Finding Mission and the Investigation and Identification Team to carry out their work on incidents of alleged use of chemical weapons so that they can collect all the relevant evidence and complement the integration of the corresponding investigations.

Similarly, Mexico calls on the Security Council to continue the thorough consideration of the information related to this matter, including that concerning the alleged use of chemical weapons by terrorist groups on Syrian territory. We are of course concerned about the reports of the use of chemical weapons and chemical agents on the territories of States parties to the Convention. The use or threat of use of weapons of mass destruction simply cannot be tolerated.

Mexico also urges that the issues surrounding the case of Syria not polarize the deliberations and decisions in other United Nations bodies, such as the First Committee of the General Assembly. We must clarify those issues in an impartial, transparent, rigorous, evidence-based and factual manner and within the existing legal framework.

Annex IX**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of the Niger to the United Nations, Niandou Aougi**

[Original: French]

I would like to begin by congratulating Tunisia on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I assure you, Mr. President, of my delegation's full support throughout the month. I welcome our new colleagues to the Council, and I thank Mrs. Izumi Nakamitsu for her briefing (annex I).

The Niger remains committed to cooperating closely with the international community for the complete elimination of chemical weapons. We therefore support the work of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and call on members to cooperate fully and in good faith with the organization to advance the ideal of ridding the world of chemical weapons and preventing their use. The use of such weapons is a threat to peace and security and a violation of international law in that regard, whether in Syria or elsewhere in the world.

Seven years after the Council's unanimous adoption of resolution 2118 (2013), the issue of the elimination of the Syrian chemical arsenal and the responsibility for the use of those weapons by the parties to the conflict in Syria continues to elude a definitive resolution, owing to the lack of cooperation between the parties concerned and the influence of external actors in the handling of the issue.

I would like to reiterate the need for the Security Council to show real unity of purpose if progress in addressing and eliminating Syrian chemical weapons is to be effective and verifiable. Such unity is indispensable because the credibility of the OPCW as well as that of the Security Council, as the principal organ with the mandate to eliminate threats to international peace and security, depend upon how we deal with the issue.

We welcome the ongoing dialogue between the OPCW secretariat and the Syrian Government to find answers to the outstanding issues in order to strengthen the initial declaration, in accordance with the Chemical Weapons Convention, the OPCW Executive Council decision EC-M-33/DEC.1, of 27 September 2013, and resolution 2118 (2013). That will contribute positively to the next round of consultations and will hopefully lead to substantial progress on that issue.

Finally, we take note of the letter by the Syrian Government alleging the introduction by armed groups of chemical products into Syria that could be used for chemical-weapon attacks under a false flag, which should not be overlooked. My delegation calls on the United Nations and the OPCW secretariat once again to pay due attention to those allegations.

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

First, allow me to join colleagues in extending my own congratulations to Tunisia for the excellent programme of work it has presented. We very much welcome your presidency this month, Sir, and look forward to working with you to make it a success. I also thank members for all their warm words of welcome to us as new members. We also extend our congratulations to our fellow incoming members.

Turning to the issue at hand this morning, I would like to thank the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Mrs. Nakamitsu, for her briefing. It is fitting that this is the first meeting we undertake as full members of the Security Council. Syria remains a large and very visible part of the Council's work — and one we are likely to devote considerable attention to.

The world has stood unified in condemning chemical weapons since the atrocities of the First World War, and yet their use remains on the Council's agenda today.

Chemical-weapon attacks in Syria have been committed with impunity so far. That is unacceptable. Those responsible must be held accountable through credible national or international criminal justice mechanisms.

Norway strongly condemns the use of chemical weapons in any situation. It is an abhorrent crime and a violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention, and one that should be addressed seriously by the Council.

Since the adoption of resolution 2118 (2013), the use of chemical weapons in Syria has been well documented and confirmed by the former Joint Investigative Mechanism of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), the United Nations and the OPCW's Investigation and Identification Team.

As part of the joint OPCW-United Nations mission, Norway, together with Denmark, conducted a naval operation to ensure the transport of chemical weapons and components out of Syria in 2014. That was a contribution to destroying Syria's chemical weapons in order to prevent further atrocities among the civilian population.

Today, almost seven years later, we are deeply concerned by the continued failure of the Syrian Arab Republic to fulfil its obligations in accordance with the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Norway has full confidence in the OPCW and its Technical Secretariat. That obviously includes full confidence in the findings of the Investigation and Identification Team concerning the use of chemical weapons in Ltamenah in Syria in March 2017.

Syria failed to respond within the 90-day deadline to the measures requested in a decision of the Executive Council of the OPCW adopted at its ninety-fourth session, in July 2020. Therefore, Norway is co-sponsoring a draft decision of the Conference of the States Parties to suspend certain rights and privileges of the Syrian Arab Republic under the Convention.

We urge the Syrian Arab Republic — as a matter of urgency — to comply in full with resolution 2118 (2013); the Chemical Weapons Convention, to which it is a State party; and the July 2020 decision of the OPCW Executive Council concerning the use of chemical weapons in Ltamenah in March 2017.

Allow me now to turn to the latest monthly report of the OPCW on progress on the elimination of the Syrian chemical-weapons programme (S/2020/1300, annex).

While we welcome progress on three of the outstanding issues from Syria's initial declaration, it is regrettable that 19 issues remain outstanding. One area of particular concern is that the OPCW has found reasons to doubt Syria's declaration that a certain facility has never been used for the production of chemical weapons. The review of all the information gathered by the OPCW's Declaration Assessment Team indicates that production and/or weaponization of chemical warfare nerve agents did take place at the facility. In order to rebuild trust, Syria must comply fully with the OPCW's request for information about the types and quantities of chemical agents produced and/or weaponized at the site.

We are also concerned by the continued failure of Syrian authorities to provide sufficient technical information or explanations about the Schedule 2.B.04 chemical detected during the third round of inspections at the Barzah facilities of the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Centre.

Norway firmly rejects attempts to discredit or bring into disrepute the OPCW and the work of the Technical Secretariat. Such attempts to undermine the international community's efforts to secure accountability and prevent the use of Chemical Weapons are deeply concerning.

Norway is committed to supporting the OPCW in its efforts to put in place arrangements to identify the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic. We will work closely with all Council members to ensure an appropriate response to the use of chemical weapons.

Annex XI**Statement by the First Deputy Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, Dmitry Polyanskiy**

[Original: Russian]

I am pleased to welcome you, Sir, to this first Security Council meeting of the New Year. We congratulate our Tunisian colleagues on their assumption of the presidency of the Security Council. I would like to assure you, Mr. President, that you can count on our full support. I would also like to extend a special welcome to the five new non-permanent members as they begin their two-year tour of duty in the Security Council and wish them a successful and productive tenure.

I thank Mrs. Izumi Nakamitsu for presenting the eighty-seventh monthly report of the Director General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) on the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013) (S/2020/1300, annex).

It is highly symbolic that we begin our work this year by discussing the Syrian chemical weapons case in an open format. At our initiative, the Council's meetings on this subject have been open since September, allowing everyone interested in the subject to obtain first-hand information. It is gratifying that not a single member of the Council objected this time. That is certainly a positive signal, an indication that all Council members have realized the importance of a transparent discussion of the subject. Transparency and a non-judgmental, fact-based approach are two of the principles that Russia promoted in the Council throughout 2020 in the context of the Syrian chemical weapons case.

To that end, we held an Arrria Formula meeting of Security Council members on 28 September, with the participation of independent experts Ian Henderson, Theodore Postol and Aaron Maté. In October, upon Russia's initiative, the Council heard the assessments of former OPCW Director General José Bustani, a professional with an impeccable reputation and many years of experience in leading the organization. His statement, which we had to read out because of the unconstructive position of Western delegations (see S/PV.8764), gives an objective "cross section" of the internal situation in the OPCW, which is fraught with serious problems with regard to its reputation and effectiveness.

For several months we have been advocating for the current OPCW Director General, Fernando Arias, to be invited to the Security Council discussion on the Syrian chemical case, which he avoided for a long time under various pretexts. Finally, in December Mr. Arias spoke before the Council (see S/2020/1202). By insisting on his invitation, we had hoped that the esteemed Director General of the OPCW would finally clarify the issues that have accumulated about the work of the Technical Secretariat of that organization, including the numerous and ever-more resonant inconsistencies and violations concerning the Syrian chemical weapons case. Unfortunately, that did not happen. The Director General confined himself to a formal reiteration of general positions that were already well known. We heard nothing new from him in the open or closed parts of the December event.

Besides, Mr. Arias could not deliver a full-fledged briefing, as the open video-conference was suddenly interrupted and transferred to a closed format. No one was able to explain why it happened. As a result, the Director General avoided answering the questions from the audience during the open part of the meeting, even though such an approach runs counter to the normal practice of briefer interventions at the Security Council. We hope that unpleasant situation for the Council will not be repeated.

We hope that in the near future Mr. Arias will have the courage to reappear before the Council and answer our questions publicly. The members of the Council who were present at the discussion on 11 December have a list of questions that we plan to recirculate for the information of new members.

Let me briefly update the new Council members and explain why the debate on the Syrian chemical dossier is generating so many emotions and opposing views in the Council. Let us look at the facts.

Syria voluntarily joined the OPCW, complied with the original declaration under the Chemical Weapons Convention and disposed of all chemical-weapon stockpiles, at Russia's instigation. In 2014, the Syrian chemical-warfare programme was completely shut down, chemical-weapon stockpiles eliminated and chemical-weapon production facilities destroyed. The OPCW has repeatedly confirmed that. Since then, Syria has cooperated fully with the OPCW, its Technical Secretariat, including the Declaration Assessment Team, and all investigative missions on the ground. Unfortunately, the hopes that all that would help to dispel the accusations against the Syrian leadership with regard to the use of chemical weapons against its population have not been realized.

During all those years, a number of States have continued to use the chemical card to build up pressure on the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, which they unsuccessfully tried to overthrow, riding the wave of the so-called Arab Spring. I will not go into details, but the fact is that Western countries continue to make extremely serious accusations against Damascus, citing unconvincing evidence, to put it mildly, such as videos from social networks or "testimonies" of knowingly biased witnesses from the anti-Government opposition or the notorious White Helmets. Yet evidence to the contrary, provided not only by Syria and Russia but also by a number of independent experts and organizations, is persistently ignored.

Unfortunately, the OPCW's Technical Secretariat plays an increasingly negative role in that process. At first, we had hopes that it could stick transparently to its technical mandate and investigate in an impartial manner the alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria. Those hopes, however, were quickly dashed. The inconsistencies in the reports of the OPCW Technical Secretariat date back to the very first reports of the Fact-Finding Mission, in which shells were found to have hit ventilation shafts of the same diameter, unguided bombs mysteriously hit the targets from as far as five kilometres from them, instead of hitting them in freefall, and White Helmet activists collected sarin samples with their bare hands.

It got even worse. The Technical Secretariat abandoned even the appearance of respecting normal practices and procedures of evidence collection, including the so-called principle of preservation of physical evidence. When some of its most responsible officers, who were not willing to overrule their conscience, sounded the alarm and refused to participate in direct forgery, the Technical Secretariat management resorted to repression, intimidation, distortion of facts and repression of dissenters in every possible way.

Yet by early 2021 the evidence of direct fabrication, manipulation and internal irregularities within the OPCW Technical Secretariat itself had grown past a critical point. It would take me hours to list them all. The most glaring examples are the egregious irregularities in the investigations into the Khan Shaykhun incidents in April 2017 and Duma in April 2018. I urge anyone interested in forming an objective view on that subject to study the submissions made by independent experts at the 28 September 2020 Arria Formula meeting I mentioned previously. They show that the Technical Secretariat conclusions on Khan Shaykhun and Duma violate the elementary laws of physics. I would also ask Council members to note the testimony

of Ian Henderson, a former OPCW inspector directly involved in the investigation of the Duma incident, who stated that the Technical Secretariat leadership, under direct pressure from Western countries, “fudged” its conclusions about the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic. Members have the summary of the that Arria Formula meeting and, upon our request, it should shortly be issued as documents of the Security Council and of the General Assembly.

The report of the Ltamenah investigation and identification team in 2017 represents a culmination of all the unscrupulous efforts of the Technical Secretariat. It is a politically biased, factually unreliable and technically inconclusive document that has been discredited by experts. We have already set out our detailed criticisms, and our arguments were circulated in a document of the Security Council last June (S/2020/551). However, one does not need to be an expert to understand that the hypothetical use of chemical weapons by Syrian Government forces was not necessary at the time, because in that period the Syrian army was successfully advancing and had already regained control of up to 75 per cent of the territory of the country.

Nevertheless, that highly questionable report formed the basis of the accusatory anti-Syrian decision of the OPCW Executive Council, which was adopted in July 2020 with the minimum number of votes required. That decision ordered the Syrian Arab Republic to comply with obviously impossible conditions — to declare the remaining chemical weapons and related facilities that it was alleged to have, but which Syria simply does not have. Naturally, the country was unable to comply with that ultimatum. As a result, our Western colleagues are now trying to initiate the process of undermining Syria’s rights at the OPCW. We hope that the majority of delegations at the Conference of States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention in April 2021 will refuse to participate in that provocation and that the essentially punitive decision initiated by a group of Western countries will not pass.

As for the Director-General’s report on the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013), we are seriously concerned that it also contains accusatory passages about outstanding issues from the original declaration. As we learned at the Arria Formula meeting from the former OPCW inspector I mentioned, Ian Henderson, the Technical Secretariat management gave explicit instructions to the Declaration Assessment Team to keep the investigation open. Following that approach, no matter how the Syrians justify themselves, the Team will not be allowed to close that part of the file. I would also like to recall the same expert’s assessment that in the initial stage of joining the Chemical Weapons Convention, many of the signatory States, when filing their declarations, had problems similar to those Syria has experienced, but those problems were treated as minor shortcomings that did not prevent the signatory States from confirming the integrity of their declarations.

I will not now go into the details of the issues surrounding the initial declaration as such, since the debate on the subject is the prerogative of The Hague, where the necessary technical expertise is available. Such expertise does not exist at the United Nations Secretariat, so it is doubly incomprehensible to us why it is pushing that topic so vigorously. However, as a general comment, I would like to point out that, according to the established practice of the OPCW, the initial declaration is a dynamic instrument. The “redeclaration” of stockpiles happens all the time and is not an anomaly. Old, abandoned chemical weapons or chemical agents used for riot control can always turn up. There are many examples of that. My United States colleague is surely aware of the fact that the United States regularly updates its declaration, which has caused its declared stockpiles to grow steadily, although only slightly. Canada, Belgium, France, Germany and other countries do the same. Our German colleagues in particular, who are known to make the most strident anti-Syrian objections at the

Security Council, themselves belatedly declared, in 2013, a facility in which nitrogen mustard gas was produced in 2011 and 2012. The alleged reason for the omission was that Berlin was unaware of the OPCW requirements. As Council members can see, no one is immune from making mistakes.

As for the problems with initial declarations, we need only mention that some 500 undeclared munitions were found in Libya in 2012, while Iraq's initial declaration was not confirmed at all and was made only on the basis of available United Nations documents. However, in those cases, the OPCW Technical Secretariat overlooked the errors in those countries' initial declarations.

In short, there is every reason to believe that Syria's initial declaration is not exceptional and the agitation around it is being artificially created by the OPCW Technical Secretariat and Western delegations. We therefore called on Director-General Arias in December to explain why the Technical Secretariat is blatantly resorting to double standards by forgiving minor flaws in the initial declarations of some countries while inciting accusations against others. We have not received any response. Instead, we see in the report another allegation that Syria does not cooperate actively enough with the OPCW in resolving the issue.

In order to avoid misunderstandings, I would like to stress that Russia, like any other responsible State member of the OPCW, categorically condemns the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere, for any purpose whatsoever. That is why it is important for us to ensure that the organization is capable of fully discharging its mandate. The problem is global and not limited to Syria. The Syrian chemical investigation was a kind of litmus test that revealed all the problems that complicate the current work of the OPCW Technical Secretariat. In fact, the problem is much broader and of a systemic nature; indeed, the crisis of confidence in what was once a most authoritative international organizations, which is unfortunately turning into an instrument of political manipulation and punishment for those who are not to the liking of some, is gaining momentum.

That is an extremely dangerous trend, and we have a collective responsibility to counter it. The OPCW is gravely ill with politicization, and those who call for it to be ignored are only exacerbating the situation. I would like to ask our colleagues who are so fond of accusing Russia of trying to undermine the credibility of the OPCW: who really wants to do good for the patient? Is it the doctor who provides diagnoses and treatments, often including procedures that are unpleasant for the patient, or is it the person who convinces the patient, contrary to objective facts, that they are perfectly healthy? Unfortunately, the OPCW is not healthy. Let us find the right treatment together.

In conclusion, I would like to assure the Security Council that we intend to continue fighting to restore trust in the OPCW and strengthen its authority, defend the foundations of the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction regime and actively oppose misinformation and blatant lies. In all that, we count on the support of every one of our colleagues in the Security Council.

Annex XII

Statement by the Political Coordinator of the Permanent Mission of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Isis Gonsalves

I congratulate Tunisia on assuming the presidency of the Security Council this month. I also thank the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Mrs. Izumi Nakamitsu, for her briefing.

As this is our first meeting for 2021, we welcome our colleagues from India, Ireland, Kenya, Mexico and Norway to the Council. We look forward to working with them this year.

I would like to begin by restating the well-established position of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines that the use of chemical weapons anywhere, by anyone and under any circumstances constitutes a reprehensible violation of international law. Perpetrators of chemical-weapon atrocities should not be allowed to operate with impunity and must be held accountable.

The weaponization of toxic chemicals is unquestionably one of the great threats to international peace and security. For that reason, we continue to support the mandate of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and its continued efforts to ensure that we achieve our collective vision of a world free of chemical weapons. Furthermore, we support all efforts to strengthen the OPCW's capacity and to ensure that the quality of its work adheres to the highest standards.

As the implementing body of the Chemical Weapons Convention, the OPCW must take all the steps necessary to ensure that the organization and its various subsidiary bodies are beyond reproach. The important work of the OPCW must therefore remain impartial and transparent and should never be politicized. Its findings must be able to withstand rigorous scrutiny so as to foster and sustain trust among States parties and the OPCW. In addition, consensus-based decisions ought to be pursued to prevent further polarization and divisiveness and promote international cooperation.

Although the coronavirus disease pandemic has created many obstacles, we commend the OPCW and Syria for remaining actively engaged and continuing the work insofar as it is possible to do so remotely. The issue of the unresolved gaps and inconsistencies in the original declaration remains open, and we are hopeful that continued dialogue between the parties will assist in further cultivating a spirit of cooperation to make certain that meaningful progress is made in that regard.

The Security Council should not overlook the many notifications by the Syrian Government in relation to the preparations of armed groups to use chemical weapons and stage chemical-weapon attacks. We reiterate that the Security Council has an obligation to give that matter due attention, make an assessment in the interest of civilian protection and ensure that the principles of international law are upheld and consistently applied.

Our goal to prevent the development, stockpiling, transfer or use of chemical weapons to better protect the future of humankind requires both the full implementation of resolution 2118 (2013) and a committed partnership with the OPCW. The Security Council, and indeed the entire international community, must work together to find common ground to fulfil that responsibility.

Annex XIII

Statement by the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Barbara Woodward

I would like to congratulate Tunisia on assuming the presidency and, as other colleagues have done, to welcome the new members of the Security Council — India, Ireland, Kenya, Mexico and Norway.

I would also like to thank Under-Secretary-General Izumi Nakamitsu for her briefing today. We reiterate our gratitude to the Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) for attending and briefing the Security Council last month (see S/2020/1202). As recognized by the Security Council in resolution 2118 (2013) and subsequent resolutions, ongoing coordination between the United Nations and the OPCW is vital if we are to collectively resolve this issue.

At this point, I would also like to reiterate our confidence in the OPCW and its Technical Secretariat. I recall that, slightly more than a year ago, the Security Council adopted a presidential statement that unanimously reaffirmed our strong support for the work of the organization (S/PRST/2019/14). Just five weeks ago, the overwhelming majority of States parties from across all regional groups voted in favour of the OPCW budget, which included renewed funding for the Investigation and Identification Team and other Technical Secretariat teams working on Syria.

I thank the OPCW Director-General for his eighty-seventh monthly report (S/2020/1300, annex). In December 2013, the Security Council unanimously decided in resolution 2118 (2013) that Syria should not use, develop, produce, otherwise acquire, stockpile or retain chemical weapons and should comply with all aspects of the decision of the OPCW Executive Council of 27 September 2013, which required it to submit a declaration on its chemical-weapons programme within 30 days. It is deeply regrettable that, seven years later, Syria's 30-day declaration can still not be considered accurate and complete.

As we have discussed previously, the unresolved issues in Syria's chemical-weapons declaration are of a serious and substantive nature. They include the unaccounted-for whereabouts of thousands of munitions and hundreds of tons of chemical agents. As the Director-General reported last month and again this month, they include a facility that Syria previously declared as not having been used for chemical-weapons production but which OPCW evidence collected since 2014 indicates was used for the production and/or weaponization of chemical-warfare nerve agents.

The ongoing threat to international peace and security posed by those unresolved issues is not hypothetical. Since Syria allegedly destroyed all of its chemical-weapons stockpile in 2014, it has been found by both the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism and the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team to have used chemical weapons on at least six occasions. Those are not hypothetical issues for the thousands of Syrian civilians who have suffered the horrifying effects on the body of nerve agents and chlorine. As we said last month, the fact that three of the unresolved issues have recently been closed shows that, contrary to the assertions of some that those issues are artificial, they are eminently capable of resolution if Syria chooses to engage genuinely and constructively.

There is increasing international concern about Syria's ongoing failure to comply with its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention and the consequent threat to international peace and security and the chemical-weapons non-proliferation regime. That is reflected in a recent decision of the OPCW Executive

Council, which set a further deadline for compliance by Syria and recommended that the Conference of the States Parties take action if Syria did not comply. Following the failure to meet that deadline, the Conference of the States Parties will consider that action this spring.

As I said earlier, it has always been recognized that the elimination of the Syrian chemical-weapons programme has to be tackled through the concerted efforts of both the OPCW and the Security Council. As we enter the eighth year of our consideration of this matter and as new colleagues join us on the Council, we look forward to renewing a serious and constructive discussion about the action that the Security Council should take to uphold its resolutions and tackle this serious threat to international peace and security.

Annex XIV**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations, Richard Mills**

Let me join you, Mr. President, in extending a welcome to the five new members of the Council that have joined us this month. On behalf of Ambassador Craft and everyone here at the United States Mission, we look forward to working with them closely on this and other issues. Let me also wish everyone a happy new year.

I thank High Representative Nakamitsu for her briefing. I do not think there is any disagreement with her concluding words that chemical weapons are unacceptable, their use is inexcusable and there is no dispute over their barbarity and unacceptability. Yet today, at our first meeting of 2021, we find ourselves, as members of the Security Council, still fighting to uphold a century-old global norm never to use such weapons again. Every month, the Council meets to urge Syria to implement its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention and resolution 2118 (2013) and to hold Syria accountable when it fails to do so.

All of us on the Council are aware that, in the more than seven years since the Al-Assad regime's accession to the Convention, it has failed to fulfil those obligations and has sought to make a mockery of the structures in place to realize a world free of chemical weapons.

We believe the Security Council has a responsibility to ensure that there are serious consequences for those who use chemical weapons. We cannot remain silent or allow chemical weapons and their use to become normalized or acceptable. The United States condemns in the strongest terms the use of chemical weapons by the Al-Assad regime, often in urban areas where civilians live and work.

Al-Assad's chemical-weapons use is not in dispute. His chemical-weapons use is not a matter of opinion. It is a matter of fact, confirmed by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). It is incumbent upon the Council to hold Syria to account for its use of chemical weapons and its obligations under resolution 2118 (2013). We support all efforts towards accountability. They are essential to bring long-overdue justice to the victims of the Al-Assad regime, who need and deserve the international community's support. Moreover, accountability is also a confidence-building measure as part of the broader political process that we called for in resolution 2254 (2015), which will bring stability and peace to Syria and the Syrian people.

The United States firmly supports the impartial and independent work of the OPCW. Given what I know will be said by my colleague who intervenes after me, let me be clear that we applaud the OPCW's leadership, the Technical Secretariat and the credible, objective and professional manner in which it carries out its mission. The OPCW's Investigation and Identification Team has diligently carried out the work of its mandate and we look forward to its future reports.

In response to the Investigation and Identification Team's past findings of Syrian chemical-weapons use, the OPCW Executive Council adopted a decision in July 2020 requesting that Syria take measures to redress the situation. In October 2020 at the OPCW and just last month in a briefing to the Council (S/2020/1202, annex II), OPCW Director-General Arias informed us that Syria had failed to complete any of the measures set forth in the July OPCW Executive Council decision. That was of course sadly unsurprising, but the world is still waiting for Syria to complete those measures.

We continue to call upon the Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention to take appropriate action when its current session reconvenes this spring and to send a strong message to the Al-Assad regime that the use of chemical weapons, in direct contravention of the Chemical Weapons Convention obligations, has consequences.

The United States, along with 45 co-sponsors from countries around the globe, submitted a draft decision to the OPCW Conference of the States Parties in response to Syria's brazen and repeated violation of its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention and its failure to fulfil the measures that were requested by the Executive Council in July. We, as Council members, must call on all countries to support that decision, which is aimed at promoting accountability for the Al-Assad regime's actions.

Over the past several months, we have seen Russia accelerate its public campaign to discredit the OPCW and its work. But neither the Council nor the world is fooled. One can say a thing, I think, loudly and repeatedly, but that does not make it true.

What is true is that the Al-Assad regime has used chemical weapons against the Syrian people. The OPCW has demonstrated that credibly and objectively, corroborating the findings of countless Syrian and international human rights groups and other documenting organizations. We urge Russia and the Al-Assad regime's other defenders to encourage Syria to come clean about its chemical-weapons use and its current chemical-weapons stocks.

The United States continues to support the work of the OPCW to rid the world of the threat and the scourge of chemical weapons. It is time for the Al-Assad regime to uphold its commitments under the Chemical Weapons Convention. It is time for accountability for the Al-Assad regime's past crimes. And it is time that the Syrian people — and indeed all the globe's people — be allowed to live in a world free of the threat of chemical weapons.

Annex XV**Statement by the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of Viet Nam to the United Nations, Pham Hai Anh**

At the outset, I would like to congratulate Tunisia on having assumed the presidency this month.

We are delighted to warmly welcome the new members of the Security Council — India, Ireland, Kenya, Mexico and Norway — and look forward to working closely with all of them during this year.

We would also like to pay tribute to former members Belgium, the Dominican Republic, Germany, Indonesia and South Africa for their contributions to the work of the Council in a very difficult year.

On today's subject, I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu for her monthly briefing on the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013).

I welcome the participation of the Permanent Representatives of Syria and Turkey at this meeting.

It has been one year and 12 meetings on this subject for Viet Nam on the Council. My delegation would like to underline the following points.

First of all, it is Viet Nam's consistent policy to categorically condemn any use of chemical weapons in any form, by anyone, anywhere, under any circumstances or for any reason. It is inhumane and a flagrant violation of international law. An investigation of any alleged use of chemical weapons needs to be conducted to ensure the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and deter potential violations. In doing so, it is important to obtain irrefutable evidence and establish the facts through a comprehensive, transparent and impartial investigative process, in full conformity with the Convention and in a non-politicized manner.

Secondly, the most viable solution to the protracted issue of chemical weapons in Syria is through continued cooperation between the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the Syrian Arab Republic. While the coronavirus disease pandemic has had certain impacts on that cooperation, we take note of the efforts made by the OPCW and Syria in the past few months, especially with respect to the clarification of outstanding issues related to the initial declaration. According to the eighty-seventh monthly report of the OPCW Director-General, we note that the process is now being carried out. We also look forward to the full resumption of the OPCW's activities in order to enhance its cooperation with Syria and settle all remaining issues.

We encourage the OPCW and Syria to build on recent achievements and step up their efforts. Promoting technical cooperation and consultations in a constructive manner is the most practical way to help resolve the remaining gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies, as mentioned in OPCW reports. Viet Nam will continue our support for the OPCW in delivering on the mandates entrusted to it by the CWC. It is of the utmost importance to enhance cooperation and coordination with a view to fully implementing the Convention and working towards the fulfilment of our common goal of a world free of chemical weapons.

Thirdly, we believe that, to achieve that end, unity and cooperation in the Council and the OPCW are fundamental. We call on all sides to engage in a constructive and non-politicized manner, focusing on the common objective of the full implementation of the CWC. Viet Nam will continue to actively participate in the work of the Conference of the States Parties to the CWC and follow closely the work of the OPCW Executive Council on this matter.

Annex XVI**Statement by the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates and Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic, Bashar Ja'afari**

I am pleased to see Tunisia presiding over the Security Council. I congratulate you on your presidency, Sir, and I am confident that you will successfully guide the work of the Council this month.

Syria and Tunisia have a great deal in common. Both our countries are part of a region renowned for the cultural and literary heritage it has shared with all the civilizations of the world. This historic legacy includes the tales of *One Thousand and One Nights*, with its characters and legends, especially the story of *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*, which has enchanted generations with its beauty and its portrayal of the symbolic triumph of good in Ali Baba over the evil of the 40 thieves. Here we are today, in the battleground of international relations in all its fragmentation, 100 years after the establishment of the League of Nations, the first multilateral international organization. The 40 thieves continue to do as they please in certain Western capitals. They have even developed their capabilities and expanded the scope of their crimes, which now extend to undermining the security and stability of dozens of States Members of this Organization, occupying their lands and looting their wealth, artefacts, oil and gas and the livelihood of their peoples.

But the thieves have not stopped at that; they have tried to distort and refashion our global heritage, replacing the delightful tales of *One Thousand and One Nights* with their 1,001 lies, which propagate aggression and destruction, and exploiting their media outlets and international forums — including our Council, unfortunately — to spread those “lies without borders”. Doctors without Borders, clowns without borders, terrorists without borders — these days, everything has to be without borders. On the basis of those lies, the thieves destroy our countries and harm our peoples, as they have done before in Iraq, Libya and elsewhere.

I once again congratulate my colleagues the Permanent Representatives of India, Norway, Ireland, Kenya and Mexico on their elections as non-permanent members of the Security Council, and I wish them success in performing their duties and upholding the principles of international law and the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations, the common denominator that unites us and provides the terms of reference for our work.

As new delegations are joining the Council, I take this opportunity to recall some of the key points of the so-called chemical question, which some Western Governments have been working to keep alive for years, continuing to use it to blackmail my country and target a State, its people and its stance.

Ms. Nakamitsu said that resolution 2118 (2013) provided for the elimination of chemical weapons in Syria. Seven years ago, Ms. Sigrid Kaag, head of the Joint Mission of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the United Nations for the Elimination of the Chemical Weapons Programme of the Syrian Arab Republic, informed the Council that Syria had implemented this resolution by using the American ship *M/V Cape Ray* and two other ships that belonged to States members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. How, then, is it possible, seven years after the Syrian Government implemented resolution 2118 (2013) and joined the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), to say that only some progress has been made, that three issues have been closed, that 19 issues remain outstanding and that the Syrian declaration is therefore incomplete? Suddenly, after seven years of cooperation between the Syrian Government and OPCW, the

Fact-Finding Mission and the Declaration Assessment Team, which is responsible for evaluating the initial declaration, three issues are closed, and Ms. Nakamitsu considers that to be progress.

Meanwhile, 19 other cases have been opened and referred to as “outstanding issues”. That means that when the Syrian Government, theoretically, of course, closes 18 of those 19 issues — and what we are talking about could transpire in five, seven or 10 years, because the question itself will remain open — another 45 new issues will be opened because the important thing is not to resolve the chemical question but instead to keep it open for political blackmail. I am speaking from experience. Let us remember that the “angels” who established the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) and the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) in the early 1990s to search for alleged weapons of mass destruction in Iraq kept open the search for Godot — that is, the nuclear weapon allegedly possessed by Iraq — in the Council until 2008, as you know.

For 17 years, the two commissions carried on searching for Godot in Iraq until that country was invaded, occupied and destroyed and its wealth stolen and plundered. In 2008, members know — and they can refer to Council archives — the two commissions stated in their final report that they had not found any weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. And so the archives of UNSCOM and UNMOVIC were buried in secret boxes with the condition that they not be opened for 60 years. Why is that? Because there are scandals that will destroy the credibility of the countries that invaded Iraq. When has there been any transparency or accountability for those who invaded Iraq, falsely accused it and lied to the Security Council and to the so-called international community?

My country has been firmly committed to non-proliferation and the disarmament of weapons of mass destruction. In 1968, Syria acceded to the 1925 Geneva Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use in War of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or Other Gases, and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare. In 1969, it acceded to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, and in 1972 it signed the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction. Syria acceded to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction in 2013.

In effect, we are a party to all conventions on the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and we have backed up our words with actions. If one refers back to the Security Council archives, as any member can easily do, they will find that, on 27 December 2003, Syria, a member of the Council at the time, submitted a draft resolution on making the Middle East a zone free of weapons of mass destruction. However, the United States delegation threatened to veto the draft resolution if it were brought to a vote, in a discriminatory bid by that country’s Government at the time to protect the Israeli chemical, biological and nuclear arsenals, as it continues to do to this day. Our draft resolution, still in blue, has been preserved in the Council archives as a testament to my country’s commitment to eradicating weapons of mass destruction and sparing humankind their dangers.

In view of the foregoing, it goes without saying that Syria once again condemns the use of chemical weapons and any other weapons of mass destruction by anyone, at any time, in any place or under any circumstances. Regrettably, my country has been the victim of those weapons, on some occasions owing to their frequent use by terrorist organizations, their sponsors and those that invest in them, and on other occasions as the target of frenzied campaigns to accuse the Syrian Government of using chemical weapons, demonize it and turn Member States against it.

The Security Council first considered the so-called chemical question eight years ago, when I sent a letter dated 8 December 2012 (S/2012/917), on behalf of my Government, to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council. In the letter, we informed them that Al-Qaida operatives were manufacturing chemical weapons in a laboratory near the Turkish city of Gaziantep and threatening to use them against Syrian civilians. We referred to Turkish media reports of videos posted on Internet sites demonstrating how to make poison gas from chemicals obtained by Al-Qaida from a Turkish company and tested on animals and other living creatures. We also sent all that information to the Security Council committees on counter-terrorism.

In the same letter, we explained that the Syrian Government had requested the United Nations Supervision Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic (UNSMIS), headed by General Robert Mood, to visit a private-sector laboratory east of Aleppo that manufactured chlorine for sterilization and cleaning purposes, in order to inspect the plant and secure the supplies because terrorist groups had been planning to seize and plunder them. However, UNSMIS was unable to make that visit because the terrorists opened fire on its staff and subsequently took control of the laboratory, which contained tons of toxic chlorine that would later be used, along with other substances, by terrorist organizations against civilians and military personnel in my country. Again, we conveyed all that information to the counter-terrorism committees of the Security Council.

Chemical weapons were first used in my country on 19 March 2013, when a terrorist group fired a missile laden with chemical gases at the Khan Al-Assal area in Aleppo governorate, killing 25 people, including 16 Syrian soldiers, and injuring dozens more who inhaled the toxic gases. My Government sent an urgent official letter to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon that same day, requesting that a specialized, impartial and independent mission be dispatched to investigate the incident and identify the perpetrators. I personally communicated with the Secretary-General on this matter, and he asked me to give him some time for consultation.

Of course, that Syrian initiative did not live up to the expectations of the Governments that sponsor terrorist organizations. France and Britain deliberately attempted to distort the Syrian letter and cover up the use of chemical weapons by terrorist organizations in Khan Al-Assal. One day after the Syrian letter, on 21 March 2013, they sent a joint letter to Ban Ki-moon alleging that there had been other cases of chemical weapons being used in Syria in Rif Dimashq and Homs governorates and calling on the Secretary-General to investigate those alleged cases. The Governments of some other State sponsors of terrorism hostile to my country, including Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, have sent dozens of similar letters to prevent the investigation mission requested by my country from confirming that terrorist organizations used prohibited weapons and to divert the mission from its intended purpose. Immediately following our complaint against the use of chemical weapons in Khan Al-Assal, the Secretary-General received 44 letters from many States hostile to my country claiming that chemical weapons had been used in Syria.

Mr. Ban Ki-moon then contacted me to inform me that he wanted to investigate all the allegations he received, namely, the Syrian complaint and the 44 other complaints, that he would request and avail himself of the information available to other States about all the alleged incidents and that he would establish an investigative mission whose mandate would be limited to ascertaining the use of chemical weapons, without identifying the perpetrators of that heinous crime, as stated later in his letter dated 22 March 2013 (S/2013/814). It would have been possible to assist the Syrian Government and respond to its initiative to prevent terrorist organizations from acquiring and using prohibited weapons; but instead,

the question was politicized and used to denigrate the Syrian Government and to cover up the crimes of terrorist organizations and their sponsors. This has been going on for seven years now.

The first scandal in the chemical question was the dispatching of the investigation team appointed by former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, headed by the Swedish expert Mr. Sellström to Damascus, five months after the Khan Al-Assal incident. Imagine that it took five months to respond to our request to send an investigative mission. We all know that chemical gases and evidence of their use are affected by the passage of that much time. Picture this: on the morning of 21 August 2013, just as Mr. Sellström and his team in Damascus had been planning to head to Khan Al-Assal to begin their investigation, there was an alleged use of chemical weapons in the Ghoutta, in Rif Dimashq and — Hallelujah! — the mission was diverted from Khan Al-Assal to that area. Eight years on, the Khan Al-Assal incident has yet to be investigated, and Mr. Sellström has yet to visit Khan Al-Assal. The identity of those who benefited is plain for all to see.

In this tale of 1,001 lies, there has been a succession of falsehoods, miracles and scandals that cannot be delved into here. They include the Khan Shaykhun incident on 4 April 2017 and the Douma incident on 7 April 2018. This is in spite of the fact that Syria has acceded to the Chemical Weapons Convention and eliminated its stockpiles of chemical weapons and the materials and facilities required for their production, as I just mentioned, and that it destroyed those stockpiles aboard the American ship *M/V Cape Ray* and other, European ships. That much was confirmed by Ms. Kaag, head of the Joint Mission of the Organization for the Prohibition and the United Nations and current Minister of Foreign Trade in the Dutch Government, in her briefing to the Security Council in June 2014.

Regrettably, the OPCW has been used in the war against my country; it and its teams have been made into a tool at the disposal of certain Governments hostile to Syria. As a result, it has issued reports that were drafted remotely without visiting the sites of the incidents. Those reports fail to meet the minimum standards of credibility, professionalism and objectivity. The conclusions of the work of OPCW are based on speculation, guesses and uncertain assumptions that rely on so-called open sources and on the allegations, fabricated evidence and false witnesses provided to it by the terrorist White Helmets organization and its sponsors.

The Organization has dealt very selectively with cases under investigation. It sought to deny the evidence presented to it by the Syrian and Russian Governments regarding the documented Aleppo incident that occurred on 24 November 2018. It accepted the allegations of terrorist organizations regarding an incident that did not occur but was alleged to have occurred in Saraqib on 1 August 2016. Nor was that all; the Fact-Finding Mission investigating the Yarmouk incident that occurred on 22 October 2017, the two incidents that occurred at Khirbat Al-Masasinah on 7 July 2017 and 4 August 2017, the Qulayb Al-Thawr incident in Salamiyah on 9 August 2017 and the Balil incident in Suran on 8 November 2017 did not publish any reports or findings regarding its investigations of the five incidents. All those incidents occurred prior to the alleged Douma incident in 2018, regarding which a seriously flawed report was issued many months ago.

Over the past few years, along with our Russian friends, we have presented scientific arguments and evidence to prove that these allegations are spurious. We have supplied documented information in more than 215 official letters and repeatedly provided testimony from academics, military experts and specialists from OPCW. They include José Bustani, former Director-General of the OPCW, whose participation in the Security Council meeting on 5 October 2020 was blocked by Western States; Ian Henderson, a 12-year veteran OPCW inspector who, as a

team leader, participated in the investigation of the Douma incident and visited Syria on several occasions as part of OPCW missions; Theodore Postol, Professor of Sciences and Technology and International Security at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; and Aaron Maté, an independent journalist and contributor to The Grayzone website and *The Nation* magazine. The briefings and highly important and documented scientific information provided by those experts proved the extent to which certain Western Governments have politicized the work of OPCW, using it as a platform to fabricate accusations and then justify aggression against Syria, thereby achieving what they had been unable to achieve by investing in and unreservedly supporting terrorism and placing a stranglehold on the Syrian people through unilateral coercive measures.

On 16 December 2020, Syria submitted its eighty-fifth monthly report to the Technical Secretariat regarding activities related to the destruction of its chemical weapons and chemical weapons production facilities. The Syrian Government stresses that it stands ready to follow up technical consultations and meetings with the OPCW Technical Secretariat, as previously agreed, and to engage in a structured dialogue with a view to resolving all outstanding issues definitively and closing the cases.

Syria condemns Western efforts and pressure to force OPCW and its member States to adopt a French-Western draft resolution falsely alleging that Syria was, in their words, “non-compliant” with its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention. Any resolution based on the decision of the ninety-fourth session of the Executive Council, which was itself based on the fabrications of the illegal so-called Investigation and Identification Team in relation to the incidents of Ltamenah, would be a purely politicized decision aimed at pinning the charge of chemical weapons use on the Syrian Government, exonerating terrorists and their sponsors, covering up their crimes, granting them entry visas to escape through the occupied Syrian Golan and, with Israeli assistance, to proceed from there to the capitals of Western countries. With them in their capitals, good luck to them.

My Government renews its call on all States members of OPCW to refuse to politicize the technical character of the organization and to address the politicization and serious flaws that have marred its work and undermined its standing and credibility.

In conclusion, as the English saying goes: “When you pray for rain, you gotta deal with the mud too”. In other words, when you beg the sky for rain, you will also get mudslides in answer to your prayers. Western Governments should heed this saying because their actions — their support for terrorism, their recruitment of foreign terrorist fighters, facilitating their travel, preventing them from being repatriated and held accountable and covering up the use of prohibited chemical weapons by terrorist organizations — are ultimately going to backfire. Those countries should therefore reconsider and abandon their wrongful policies.

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

I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on Tunisia's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I would also like to thank High Representative Nakamitsu for her briefing (annex I). I would like to welcome the new members of the Security Council — India, Ireland, Kenya, Mexico and Norway — and wish them every success.

We have analysed the eighty-seventh monthly report (see S/2020/1300, annex) of the Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) on the Syrian regime's chemical weapons programme. The findings in the report deepen our concerns regarding the outstanding issues in relation to the Al-Assad regime's chemical weapons declaration. Out of the 19 outstanding issues established by the OPCW, one is particularly alarming. A chemical weapons production facility obviously exists, in stark contradiction to the regime's claim to the contrary. That is yet more proof of the fraudulent nature of the Syrian regime's chemical weapons declaration.

As the OPCW Director-General highlighted before the Council last month (see S/2020/1202, annex II), the identified gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies in that declaration still remain. The regime must therefore fully cooperate with the Declaration Assessment Team and immediately declare the full extent of its chemical weapons programme to the OPCW. That would require, among other things, the declaration of the exact types and quantities of chemical agents produced and/or weaponized, in line with the relevant provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention. In order to ensure that, the international community, particularly the Security Council, must act in unity and with determination.

The OPCW Executive Council decision of 9 July 2020 remains particularly important. It set clear and verifiable parameters for action and required that the Syrian regime return to full compliance with the Convention within 90 days. Turkey co-sponsored that decision. As the OPCW Director-General confirmed both in his briefing to the Council last month and in his report in October (see S/2020/1033, annex), the Syrian regime has failed to fulfil its obligations under that decision. We therefore support concrete measures to address the persistent non-compliance of the Syrian regime with the Chemical Weapons Convention. To that end, Turkey has co-sponsored a draft decision, along with 45 other States parties, that will be considered during the second part of the twenty-fifth session of the Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention.

We strongly condemn the repeated and well-documented use of chemical weapons by the regime against its own population. We look forward to the completion of the current investigations by the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission and the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT). Turkey reiterates its full support for the IIT, which plays a critical role in identifying the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons in Syria. We once again express our confidence in, and support for, the OPCW Technical Secretariat and its investigative bodies. Their dedicated work is critical and must be supported. We regret attempts that question their integrity and credibility.

It is more than seven years since the attack on Ghouta. It is high time to take concrete action in order to ensure accountability in Syria. We have enough evidence of the culpability of the regime, as documented in the reports of the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism, the Fact-Finding Mission and, most recently, the IIT report on the incidents in Ltamenah. We once again condemn in the

strongest possible terms the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian Arab Air Force in Ltamenah on three occasions in March 2017, as established by the IIT report.

In conclusion, we must act now to end impunity for the use of chemical weapons in Syria. Urging the regime to ensure swift and concrete cooperation with the OPCW is an indispensable step for the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013). It is also key to preventing the recurrence of the use of chemical weapons by the regime. In that regard, I would like to once again underline the special responsibility of those who have influence on the Syrian regime.

As for the statement made by the representative of the Syrian regime (annex XVI), I reiterate that I do not consider him my legitimate counterpart. His presence here is an affront to the millions of Syrians who suffered countless crimes at the hands of the regime. I will therefore not honour his delusional remarks with a response.
