



Security Council

Seventy-sixth year

8830th meeting
 Wednesday, 4 August 2021, 10 a.m.
 New York

Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Tirumurti	(India)
<i>Members:</i>	China	Mr. Sun Zhiqiang
	Estonia	Mr. Lipand
	France	Mrs. Broadhurst Estival
	Ireland	Mr. Flynn
	Kenya	Mr. Kiboino
	Mexico	Mr. De la Fuente Ramírez
	Niger	Mr. Abarry
	Norway	Mr. Kvalheim
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	Ms. Gonsalves
	Tunisia	Mr. Ladeb
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Dame Barbara Woodward
	United States of America	Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield
	Viet Nam	Mr. Dang

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Letter dated 29 July 2021 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2021/692)

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

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Letter dated 29 July 2021 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2021/692)

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

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Thomas Markram, Deputy to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, to participate in this meeting.

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

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2021/692, which contains the text of a letter dated 29 July 2021 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council.

I now give the floor to Mr. Markram.

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

Since the previous Security Council meeting on resolution 2118 (2013), held on 12 July, the Office for Disarmament Affairs has maintained regular contact with its counterparts at the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) on its activities related to this matter. As I have previously informed the Council, the ongoing coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has affected the OPCW Technical Secretariat's ability to deploy to the Syrian Arab Republic. Nevertheless, the Secretariat maintains its readiness for deployments, which are being conducted subject to the evolution of the pandemic. Despite the travel restrictions, the Technical Secretariat continues to undertake its mandated activities related

to the elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme and its engagement with the Syrian Arab Republic in that regard.

Efforts by the OPCW Declaration Assessment Team are still ongoing to clarify all outstanding issues regarding the initial declaration of the Syrian Arab Republic to the OPCW. In that context, the OPCW Technical Secretariat remains of the position that the Syrian Arab Republic must declare all chemical warfare agents produced and/or weaponized at the former chemical weapons production facility that was declared by the Syrian Arab Republic as never having been used to produce and/or weaponize chemical weapons.

As previously reported, the OPCW Technical Secretariat intended to deploy the Declaration Assessment Team to Damascus in May to conduct the twenty-fifth round of consultations with the Syrian National Authority. However, in the absence of a response from the Syrian Arab Republic, the OPCW Secretariat informed the Syrian Arab Republic that the deployment was postponed until further notice. As a result of the identified gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies that remained unresolved, the OPCW Technical Secretariat continues to assess that, at this stage, the declaration submitted by the Syrian Arab Republic cannot be considered accurate and complete in accordance with the Chemical Weapons Convention. I reiterate my call to the Syrian Arab Republic to extend its full cooperation to the OPCW Technical Secretariat to resolve all outstanding issues. As noted on many prior occasions, the confidence of the international community in the complete elimination of Syria's chemical weapons programme depends on such issues being finalized.

I have been advised that the OPCW Technical Secretariat still plans to conduct two rounds of inspections of the Barzah and Jamraya facilities of the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Centre (SSRC) in 2021. I am also advised that the Syrian Arab Republic has yet to provide sufficient technical information or explanations that would enable the OPCW Technical Secretariat to close the issue related to the detection of a Schedule 2 chemical at the Barzah facility of the SSRC in 2018. I note that the OPCW Director-General sent a letter to the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Syrian Arab Republic, Mr. Fayssal Mekdad, proposing an in-person meeting to discuss relevant developments and the way forward regarding the OPCW Technical Secretariat's mandated activities

in the Syrian Arab Republic. On 7 July, Mr. Mekdad agreed to the OPCW Director-General's proposal. As noted in the monthly report (S/2021/692, annex), the OPCW Technical Secretariat stands ready to engage for the Syrian Arab Republic to initiate preparations for the meeting and will update the OPCW Executive Council in due course.

I have been advised that, on 9 July, the Syrian National Authority sent to the OPCW Technical Secretariat a note verbale reporting an attack that had taken place on 8 June targeting a military facility that housed a declared former chemical weapons production facility. On 15 July, the OPCW Technical Secretariat requested further information regarding the damage caused to the declared site given that it was related to an outstanding issue recently opened by data assessment team. In its note verbale, the Syrian National Authority also reported the destruction of two chlorine cylinders related to the chemical weapons incident that took place in Douma on 7 April 2018. In its reply, the OPCW Technical Secretariat recalled the last inspection of those cylinders in November 2020, for which the inspection team was mandated to transport the cylinders to the OPCW headquarters.

During that deployment, the Syrian Arab Republic notified the inspection team that the cylinders could not be shipped outside its territory. The OPCW Technical Secretariat recalled that the cylinders were stored and inspected at another declared site, approximately 60 kilometres from the location at which they had reportedly been destroyed on 8 June. In addition, the Technical Secretariat recalled that it had previously advised the Syrian Arab Republic that it was not to open, move or alter the containers or the contents in any way without seeking the prior written consent of the Technical Secretariat. I understand that the Syrian National Authority did not notify the OPCW Technical Secretariat that the cylinders had been moved to a new location until it reported their destruction. Accordingly, in its note verbale dated 15 July, the OPCW Technical Secretariat requested Syria to provide all relevant information regarding the movement of the two cylinders and any remains of their destruction.

With regard to the work of the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic (FFM), I note that the FFM remains in the process of studying all available information related to allegations of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic. It also continues to engage 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.

I understand that, following the issuance of its second report, in April, the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) continues its investigations into incidents in which the FFM has determined that chemical weapons were used or likely used in the Syrian Arab Republic. The IIT will issue further reports in due course, subject to the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic. I take this opportunity to reiterate the Secretary-General's full support for the integrity, professionalism, impartiality, objectivity and independence of the work of the OPCW.

As I informed the Council, on 21 April 2021 the Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention, at its twenty-fifth session, adopted decision C-25/Dec.9, entitled "Addressing the Possession and Use of Chemical Weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic", suspending the rights and privileges of the Syrian Arab Republic under the Convention. According to paragraph 8 of that decision, the rights and privileges of the Syrian Arab Republic will be reinstated by the Conference of the States Parties once the OPCW Director-General has reported to the Executive Council that the Syrian Arab Republic has completed all the measures contained in paragraph 5 of Executive Council decision EC-94/Dec.2. I have been advised that the Syrian Arab Republic has yet to complete all of those measures. I therefore reiterate my call to the Syrian Arab Republic to cooperate fully with the OPCW Technical Secretariat in that regard.

Although almost eight years have now passed since the adoption of resolution 2118 (2013), there is still work to be done before that resolution can be considered to be fully implemented. Moreover, as long as the use of chemical weapons continues or the threat of their use remains, we must maintain our focus on preventing those threats. Unity in the Security Council is required to re-establish the norm against chemical weapons. The use of such weapons must always be seen as a clear violation of a deeply held taboo. Accordingly, the identification and accountability of those responsible are imperative.

The President: I thank Mr. Markram for his briefing.

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

Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield (United States of America): I would like to start today by congratulating France on its successful presidency of the Security Council in July and to wish India and its team success during the month of August. I also wish to thank Mr. Thomas Markram for his briefing and for the extraordinary work of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

Later this month, on 21 August, we will mark eight years since the Al-Assad regime horrifically attacked and killed hundreds of Syrian men, women and children in Ghouta with sarin gas. That terrible attack is not the only one. The Al-Assad regime's appalling use of chemical weapons against the Syrian people is well documented. The OPCW's Investigation and Identification Team has attributed four separate chemical-weapons attacks in Syria to the Al-Assad regime. Those incidents are in addition to the four chemical-weapons attacks attributed to the Al-Assad regime by the former OPCW Joint Investigative Mechanism.

The OPCW earnestly attempts to engage the Al-Assad regime and assist it with complying with its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention. Sadly, the Al-Assad regime, supported by Russia, continues to ignore calls from the international community to fully disclose and verifiably destroy its chemical-weapons programmes. Instead, the Al-Assad regime continues to deliberately delay and obstruct the work of the OPCW's Declaration Assessment Team.

The Security Council must call out atrocities and hold those who use chemical weapons accountable. Without accountability for the atrocities committed against the Syrian people, lasting peace in Syria will remain out of reach. It is disappointing that the use of a weapon of mass destruction by a Government against its own people could possibly be a source of political conflict in the Council. Fortunately, more and more members of the international community want to hold the Al-Assad regime accountable.

The April decision of the OPCW Conference of the State Parties to condemn Syria's use of chemical weapons and suspend certain rights and privileges of Syria under the Chemical Weapons Convention sent a clear and unequivocal message — the use of chemical weapons has consequences. Nearly 90 nations supported such actions. Only a small number of Al-Assad enablers, including Russia, sadly, stood in opposition. Given the voting trends at the OPCW, it is clear that the Russian

and Al-Assad disinformation, including as propagated here in the Security Council every month, is failing to persuade most States. The United States, along with an overwhelming number of responsible nations, will continue to support the work of the OPCW in carrying out its critical mandate against the backdrop of the continued threat of chemical-weapons use.

The Security Council must unite to forcefully condemn this method of warfare, and the international community must identify and hold accountable all those who use such weapons in violation of international law. There simply cannot be impunity for the use of chemical weapons.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Like our American colleague, we would like to thank France for its successful presidency in July, and we wish you, Mr. President, the very best during your presidency this month. We stand ready to cooperate and pledge our help. We are especially grateful to you and your team for convening the Security Council today to discuss the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013) in person. We are convinced that this is the most effective way to organize such a discussion. In the context of the Syrian chemical dossier, we believe that transparency is of fundamental importance, particularly given the line being pursued over the past few years by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Technical Secretariat.

We also thank Mr. Thomas Markram for presenting the ninety-fourth regular report (S/2021/692, annex) of the OPCW Director-General. Unfortunately, as is the case for previous reports, we cannot agree with many of the assessments contained in it. We were particularly surprised by the positive assessment of the June briefing by Mr. Fernando Arias, OPCW Director-General at the Security Council June briefing (see S/PV.8785). The report claims that Mr. Arias provided detailed answers to questions asked during the meeting.

It is difficult to imagine a more absurd statement that would be further from the truth. There were so many inconsistencies and outright distortions in the responses of Mr. Arias to the questions of Security Council members, and they were so blatant that we were forced to respond by circulating our arguments as an official Security Council document (S/2021/641). A similar step had to be taken by the Syrian delegation, in document S/2021/588. We call on all delegations

interested in forming an objective view on the matter to study those materials.

I will not go into detail now on all the contradictions we noticed in the statement of Mr. Arias. We expect to do that during the next briefing by OPCW leadership in the Security Council, which we hope will not be long in coming. I will mention only the most egregious ones.

The Director-General was bold enough to assert that the Russian Federation initially agreed with the findings of the Fact-Finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic (FFM) regarding the April 2018 Douma incident. In doing so, he selectively cited note No. 759 of the Russian Federation's Permanent Mission to the OPCW, dated 26 April 2019.

This is blatant fraud and misinformation because, in doing so, he omitted the main conclusion drawn in that note — that Russia insists on the staged nature of the incident because the analysis presented in the FFM report (S/1731/2019) does not allow for the conclusion that toxic chemicals were used as weapons.

We believe that it is at the very least inappropriate for the Director-General to state that the calls contained in resolution 2118 (2013) to prosecute those responsible for the use of chemical weapons allegedly give legitimacy to the work of the so-called Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) established by the OPCW, in violation of article XV of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

The decision of the fourth special session of the OPCW Executive Council in June 2018 only asked the Director-General of the Technical Secretariat to submit considerations for the involvement of external qualified experts with the relevant professional experience in OPCW investigations at the request of a CWC State party and in general to strengthen the secretariat's capacity and means in order to better implement the Convention's verification regime.

In practice, however, Mr. Arias and his team have essentially created the IIT themselves and developed its terms of reference. The OPCW Executive Council, in violation of paragraph 35 of article VIII, did not even consider any preliminary considerations in that regard. It was presented as a fact. What, then, is the strictly technical role of the Technical Secretariat of which Mr. Arias speaks? I want to emphasize that the Security Council has never delegated its exclusive attribution powers, as defined by the Charter, either to

the OPCW or, of course, to its Technical Secretariat. It is not surprising that the reports of the illegitimate IIT were prepared in violation of CWC norms regarding methodology and data collection. They are biased in nature and pursue just one goal: not to paint a real picture of events but, rather, to make the facts fit the conclusions about Damascus's guilt — in other words, essentially to carry out a political order.

We therefore reject the conclusions on both the already issued reports of the IIT on Lataminah and Saraqib as well as any of its future so-called products. It is shocking that Mr. Arias essentially openly admitted that the OPCW technical criteria do not follow the CWC chain-of-custody methodology when conducting investigations and that instead it uses its own innovative methods of some sort. That is being presented not as a direct violation of the Convention but, rather, as a point of pride.

We deplore Mr. Arias's outright dismissive attitude shown during the June briefing towards two now former staff members of the Technical Secretariat, who, as fair and impartial civil servants should, were not able to accept outright forgeries and decided to shed light on the glaring manipulations in the conclusions of the Douma report. Contrary to Mr. Arias's claims, both inspectors are highly qualified experts with a great amount of experience in the OPCW and were directly involved in the investigation of the Douma incident, of which we have documentary evidence.

We have yet to receive clear explanations from the Director-General about why the Technical Secretariat's approach to the initial declaration of Syria is much stricter than towards other countries such as Libya or Iraq, which encountered similar problems yet were not barraged by the same amount of criticism as Syria, which joined the OPCW in exceptionally complicated circumstances of military and political instability and externally fuelled terrorism.

Despite that, Syria complied with all its obligations in good faith, as the Secretary-General reported to the Security Council in June 2014. The fact that Syria's chemical-warfare stockpiles were limited was confirmed by the Executive Council and the OPCW Conference of the State Parties in 2016.

The Technical Secretariat does not have any special prerogatives with regard to Syria's initial declaration in accordance with article IV, paragraph 8, of the Convention. Contrary to Mr. Arias's claims, the

Convention does not grant the Technical Secretariat any right to apply more complex and politically motivated requirements regarding verification. However, that is what we are actually seeing. The more Syrians try to meet the Technical Secretariat halfway, hosting inspection teams in good faith and accepting intrusive verifications, the more criticism they receive.

I would like to particularly touch upon something mentioned in the report (S/2021/692, annex), namely, an air strike on a former declared chemical-weapons production facility in Syria on 8 June during which two cylinders connected to the Douma incident in April 2018 were destroyed. It is very strange, at the very least, to see the report focus on the fact that the Syrian party moved those cylinders without any assessment of the very fact of that air strike. Even if the Syrian party did move them within its own territory, which as we understand, Syria has full rights to do, does that mean that the air strike, which is essentially an act of aggression against a sovereign State, was justified? And yet this is exactly how some of these paragraphs in the report currently read.

We believe that we should now be concerned by another issue entirely. Whom did this air strike really benefit? It certainly did not benefit the Syrians themselves. It is difficult to imagine that they would seek such a complicated way to rid themselves of those cylinders. It seems much likely that this was an attempt by external forces to cover up their tracks in the light of the many public discussions regarding the manipulations in the Douma report. We have repeatedly warned about the destructive impact that the punitive decision to strip the Syrian Arab Republic of its rights — which the delegations of the Western States pushed for — could undermine the authority of the OPCW, as we know it was not considered in the Executive Council and violates the principle of consensus. I should like to recall that less than half of Member States voted in favour of it and only the six Western States in the current Council voted in favour. The others either voted against or abstained, and a number of former Council members took the same position. That is an obviously unjust decision whose only goal is to make Damascus an outcast and destroy the motivation for any other State to cooperate with the OPCW.

However, despite all that, Syria is continuing to pursue cooperation and is showing openness to dialogue between the leadership of the Technical Secretariat at the highest level, as confirmed in the current report

of the Director-General. In our view, that is the best illustration of the fact that any claims about the dialogue between Syria and the OPCW faltering are completely untrue and unfounded.

In conclusion, I would like to note that all that Russia is calling for is strict compliance with the CWC, both by Member States and the Technical Secretariat, along with the Director-General. He is called upon to act as a fair broker together with the OPCW. Instead, we see a paradoxical situation where the Technical Secretariat itself violates it, and the Director-General, instead of clamping down on such violations, seems to boast about them. We are seeing increasingly dangerous politicization in the OPCW, which is growing every month, turning the OPCW from an unbiased and independent guardian into an instrument for punishing undesirable Governments in order to pursue and advance the geopolitical aims of certain States. All of this creates a serious threat to the organization and casts a shadow on one of the main pillars of the weapons of mass destruction non-proliferation regime and undermines the effectiveness of the realization of the OPCW's mandate.

Unfortunately, it seems that the situation is something that Mr. Arias is quite happy with; otherwise, it is very difficult to explain his behaviour, which has already worsened the situation when it comes to the OPCW implementing its mandate, and, unfortunately, we do not see any further reasons for optimism at this time.

Mr. Ladeb (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to begin by congratulating you, Sir, on your presidency of the Council and to wish you and your team every success. I should like also to thank France for its excellent presidency of the Council last month. I also thank Mr. Thomas Markram, Deputy to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, for his briefing, and I welcome the participation of the representatives of Syria and Iran in this meeting.

At the outset, Tunisia reaffirms its adherence to the prohibition and non-proliferation regime on chemical weapons. It is a regime based on rules, agreements and multilateralism in order to put an end to the threat to humankind from chemical weapons. In that context, Tunisia supports the vital mandate of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to carry out independent and impartial verification responsibilities, including in the Syrian Arab Republic.

The OPCW is also a forum for discussion and cooperation among States on relevant issues.

We have taken note of the ninety-fourth monthly report (S/2021/692, annex) of the OPCW Director-General pursuant to resolution 2118 (2013). We welcome the initial agreement between the OPCW Director-General and the Syrian Foreign Minister and Expatriates on holding an in-person meeting in the upcoming period. We hope that the meeting will make progress on the Syrian chemical dossier and that the Technical Secretariat of the OPCW will continue its activities on the ground in the Syrian Arab Republic as well as building mutual trust and understanding through a structured, constructive and transparent dialogue between the two parties. We also call for restoring engagement, coordination and cooperation between the OPCW and the Syrian Government, without ignoring the limitations and challenges posed by coronavirus disease pandemic. That would lead to swiftly resolving the outstanding and emerging issues and ensuring that Syria fulfils its contractual commitments.

Finally, Tunisia reiterates our steadfast condemnation of the use of chemical weapons wherever, by whomsoever, in any circumstances and under any motives and justifications. We stress the need to fully, transparently and impartially investigate the allegations of the use of toxic chemical materials as weapons by any party and to hold accountable the perpetrators of such horrible crimes.

The international community and the Security Council need to make concerted and coordinated efforts while taking responsibility to monitor the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention and resolution 2118 (2013) in order to end the chemical threat, ensure the rule of law and accountability and strengthen trust in the effectiveness of the prohibition and non-proliferation regime for the maintenance of international peace and security.

Dame Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom): I would like to joint others in thanking France for its presidency of the Security Council for the month of July and in wishing India every success during its presidency this month. I would also like to thank Mr. Thomas Markram, Deputy to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, for his briefing.

Article 25 of the Charter of the United Nations requires Member States to accept and carry out the decisions of the Security Council. In resolution 2118

(2013), the Security Council decided that Syria would not use, produce or retain chemical weapons and that it would cooperate fully with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and its personnel, providing them with immediate and unfettered access.

By using chemical weapons throughout the conflict and failing to comply fully with the OPCW and its various teams, Syria has repeatedly breached its obligations under the Charter, Security Council resolutions, the Chemical Weapons Convention and decisions of the OPCW. Unfortunately, the Director-General's monthly report (S/2021/692, annex) provides further ongoing evidence of non-compliance.

First, there has been no progress in resolving the 20 outstanding issues in Syria's chemical weapons declaration. In the light of Syria's willingness to use chemical weapons throughout the conflict, that represents an ongoing threat to international peace and security.

Secondly, we note the ongoing failure to grant visas to members of the Declaration Assessment Team. That is unacceptable. Syria is required to give immediate and unfettered access to OPCW personnel, including members of the Declaration Assessment Team.

Thirdly, we note the alleged destruction of two chlorine cylinders connected to the 2018 Douma chemical weapons attack in a strike on a former chemical weapons production facility. We understand that the OPCW was in the process of attempting to take those cylinders to The Hague for further investigation. As the OPCW observes, if the cylinders were destroyed at that facility, it means that Syria had moved the cylinders from another facility 60 kilometres away, against the express instructions of the OPCW. That incident represents not only a highly concerning failure by Syria to comply with important OPCW requests, but also unauthorized interference with evidence central to an ongoing high-profile investigation.

We yet again urge Syria to comply with its obligations and refrain from actions not consistent with them. We note the proposed meeting between the OPCW's Director-General and Mr. Fayssal Mekdad. We hope that that will be an opportunity for renewed commitment by Syria to compliance and set it on the path towards restoring its rights and privileges under the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Lastly, we once again commend the OPCW Technical Secretariat's professionalism, integrity and tireless efforts to support Syria on the road to compliance.

Mr. De la Fuente Ramírez (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): We wish you every success, Mr. President, during your presidency this month, and we thank France very much for its leadership last month.

I am grateful for the briefing by Mr. Thomas Markram and express our concern about what happened on 8 July when, as reported by the Syrian National Authority, one of its declared former chemical weapons production facilities was attacked, which contained two chlorine cylinders, related to the incident that took place in Douma in April 2018. The latter chain of events is alarming, especially given the fact that, in addition to being yet another sign of the violence in the region, those materials were a core part of the evidence in the investigations of the Fact-Finding Mission of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). It is necessary to clarify the facts and for Syria to provide details on the damage caused to the cylinders and the whereabouts of their remnants, as requested by the OPCW Technical Secretariat. It would also be desirable to clarify the reason that those cylinders were relocated without prior notification to the OPCW. Nonetheless, we believe it to be a positive sign that the Director-General of the OPCW and the Syrian Foreign Minister have agreed to hold an in-person meeting to discuss the mandate of the OPCW Technical Secretariat in Syria. We trust that meeting will be productive so as to move forward the dialogue required to resolve outstanding issues and restore trust among the parties.

We take note that, once again, the report (S/2021/692, annex) indicates that, according to the OPCW Technical Secretariat, the declaration submitted by Syria cannot be considered complete, given that the Declaration Assessment Team continues to await information from the Syrian Government on outstanding issues and inconsistencies in the initial declaration. One of them is the technical clarification with regard to the chemical that was detected during the third round of inspections conducted at the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Centre in Barzah. In addition, two rounds of inspections are still pending at the Centre, which have not been carried out because of the pandemic.

We urge Syria to comply with its obligations as a party to the Chemical Weapons Convention, as well as with decisions taken by the Security Council and the OPCW Executive Council, so as to cooperate with investigations conducted by the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission and its Investigation and Identification Team, whose objective is to shed light on the origin of the chemical weapons used in incidents in Syria.

Mexico commends the professionalism with which the OPCW conducts its work and investigation and verification tasks. We also reiterate that we believe that it is important for the Council to have more direct and constant contact with the OPCW, including with the heads of investigation teams.

In conclusion, Mexico reiterates that chemical weapons are banned under international law and their use by any actor under any circumstances is unacceptable. Similarly, we underscore that dialogue and the quest for political solutions is the only path to resolving the issue that brings us together today.

Mr. Abarry (Niger) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, allow me to congratulate France on a successful presidency in July and to wish you, Mr. President, every success in guiding our work in the month of August. I would also like to thank Mr. Thomas Markram for his briefing.

We reiterate that the solution to the issue of chemical weapons in Syria requires the members of the Security Council to be united in their views on the direction and objectives of the work of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in Syria. The lack of consensus on how to address or interpret incidents that have occurred and on the identification of the perpetrators of those incidents is an impediment to ensuring accountability for those responsible, much to the detriment of the victims waiting for justice to be served. Nevertheless, let me underscore the following three points.

First, all incidents of the use of chemical weapons in Syria should be given the same attention and be addressed with the same rigour to ensure that perpetrators are held responsible. Differences of opinion among Security Council members must give way to a steady and technical analysis of the findings of investigations so as to guarantee the integrity of the OPCW, which is key for my country.

My delegation would like to reiterate that any action other than that aimed at the full implementation of resolution 2118 (2013), the report of the OPCW (S/2021/692, annex) and its findings must be avoided. It is therefore crucial that the OPCW continue to work towards that goal, while ensuring that it enjoys the full confidence of Member States, through transparency and by fostering a spirit of consensus in its deliberations. Similarly, the Technical Secretariat must adopt a more inclusive and rigorous approach to ensure that the findings of its work are accepted by everyone.

Secondly, we call on the Syrian Government to enhance its cooperation with OPCW teams concerning the request for additional information on outstanding items in the initial declaration and on the issuance of visas to experts, so as to turn the controversial page of finalizing the initial declaration. In addition, my delegation welcomes the efforts of the Syrian Government to provide more information via ongoing communications with the OPCW and the Security Council.

Thirdly, allegations that armed terrorist groups in Syria are, or would like to be, in possession of chemical substances, as well as of the possible threat of their use, should not be taken lightly. My delegation calls on the United Nations, the OPCW and the Syrian Arab Republic to pay special attention to such allegations.

In conclusion, the Niger reiterates its categorical rejection of any use of chemical weapons by any actor under any circumstances, as such acts are a serious violation of international law. They cannot be tolerated or go unpunished.

Ms. Gonsalves (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines): We join others in congratulating India on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council. We wish the members of the Indian delegation the very best. They can count on our support. We also commend France for a well-organized and successful presidency last month.

Chemical weapons do not discriminate between combatants and civilians, and their effects are horrifying. Their development and use remain a threat to international peace and security and constitute a grave violation of international law. Allegations of the use of chemical weapons therefore ought to be given immediate attention, and investigations must be comprehensive, impartial, transparent and in keeping with international best practices. As such, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons

(OPCW) bears a great responsibility as the guardian of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

We acknowledge the efforts to continue work on this file, despite the impediments created by the coronavirus disease pandemic. However, we remain concerned about the continued long-term lack of movement. Gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies in the initial declaration remain unresolved and engagement is strained. Undoubtedly, there are many diverging views and trust deficits exist. It is therefore imperative that all parties prioritize dialogue and technical consultations to chart a practical and constructive way forward to make tangible progress. In that regard, we welcome the agreement between the OPCW and Syria to convene an in-person meeting to discuss relevant developments. That is indeed a positive and important step to bridge the gaps and to ensure the full implementation of resolution 2118 (2013). It is our hope that preparations will be finalized soon.

We reiterate the importance of pursuing consensus-based decisions to thwart further polarization and foster cooperation among States parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention. Political differences ought to be set aside in favour of a commitment to working together to realize our collective goal of a world free of chemical weapons.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines remains in support of the mandate of the OPCW, and we encourage all efforts aimed at strengthening its capacity to ensure that it always functions as an effective multilateral institution.

Mr. Kiboino (Kenya): Let me join other speakers in commending France for its leadership during its just-concluded Security Council presidency in the month of July. I also congratulate you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Council for the month of August and assure you of Kenya's support and cooperation. Let me thank Mr. Markram for his briefing and welcome the participation of the representatives of the Syrian Arab Republic and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

I take note of the ninety-fourth monthly report of the Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) (S/2021/692, annex), as well as the submission by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic of its ninety-second monthly report.

At the beginning of every month, the Security Council has to consider the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013). Unfortunately, there is hardly ever any significant positive movement to talk about.

I reaffirm Kenya's firm conviction and belief that the use of chemical weapons anywhere and by anyone constitutes an unacceptable violation of international law. Indeed, no cause can ever justify the use of a weapon of mass destruction under any circumstance whatsoever. Resolution 2118 (2013) is clear: the use of chemical weapons anywhere constitutes a threat to international peace and security.

Kenya supports the mandate of the OPCW and its responsibility as the technical body overseeing the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention. We note its continued efforts to execute its mandated activities pertaining to the elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme in the face of the challenges related to the coronavirus disease. In that regard, we encourage enhanced cooperation between the Syrian Arab Republic and the OPCW Technical Secretariat, including through the use of modern technology for continued engagement.

We believe that an expeditious closure of investigations into the use of chemical weapons in Syria will allow the Council to support the Syrian people meaningfully in their quest for peace and stability. For that to happen, cooperation and collaboration in an open and transparent manner is critical to resolving the outstanding issues.

In addition, the Security Council should support efforts to strengthen the OPCW to ensure that the investigations are conducted comprehensively and conclusively, based on substantiated and reliable sources. The sensitive nature of its important work is reflected in the expectation of the international community that its work always remains above reproach.

Finally, Kenya reiterates its solidarity with, and support for, the people of Syria as they continue to seek a sustainable solution through an inclusive Syrian-led dialogue aimed at a political solution that is genuinely responsive to the will and the needs of the millions of the Syrian people, who have endured suffering for far too long.

Mr. Flynn (Ireland): I join other speakers in congratulating France on its successful presidency of the Security Council last month and in wishing you,

Mr. President, all the best for this month. I would like to thank Mr. Markham for his comprehensive briefing today.

The use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere, at any time is abhorrent and unacceptable. The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) plays an essential role as the impartial and technical body mandated by the international community to address such weapons.

The absence of progress by Syria in addressing the serious and growing list of issues under its initial declaration remains a matter of serious concern. Syria's lack of meaningful cooperation with the OPCW, as set out most recently in the Director-General's report of 23 July (S/2021/692, annex), is also a significant concern.

The fundamental question is whether Syria is willing to cooperate meaningfully with the OPCW to resolve these issues and to provide assurance that they have met their commitments under the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC).

The issues are deeply troubling, and the significant gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies in Syria's explanations cannot simply be dismissed. Syria's failure to issue visas in a timely manner and to grant full access to sites and documents related to its chemical weapons programme hampers the OPCW's work to investigate these issues. As other speakers mentioned, the destruction of chlorine cylinders from the incident at Douma is disturbing and symptomatic of the difficulties that the OPCW faces in Syria. The fact that the cylinders had been moved to a new location without informing the OPCW is also troubling.

The failure to meaningfully address these issues is all the more important given that eight instances of chemical weapons use in Syria have been attributed to the Syrian authorities by the United Nations and the OPCW.

We welcome and support the initiative by Director-General Arias to reach out to Syrian Foreign Minister Mekdad about a possible meeting to find a way to break the impasse. We encourage Syria to engage seriously with Director-General Arias's offer, and hope that this can contribute to much-needed progress. Syria has stated that it is willing to fully cooperate. Now is the time to back that up with meaningful action. The OPCW's strong professionalism, impartiality and

integrity in handling the Syrian file has been clear throughout the process.

Syria must fulfil its legal obligations under the CWC and resolution 2118 (2013). It must cooperate fully with the OPCW. It must resolve the serious issues with its declaration. Finally, it must ensure that its entire stocks of chemical weapons are declared and verifiably destroyed.

Mr. Dang (Viet Nam): I join the other speakers in thanking France for its excellent presidency of the Security Council in July, and my congratulations go to India on its presidency in August. We assure you, Mr. President, of our full support for your success this month. I also thank Mr. Thomas Markram, Deputy to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, for his briefing. I welcome the participation of the representatives of Syria and Iran in our meeting today.

It has always been Viet Nam's consistent policy to strongly support non-proliferation and disarmament of weapons of mass destruction, including chemical weapons. We unequivocally condemn uses of those weapons. The obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) must be fully respected to prevent all inhumane effects of such weapons on human life and the environment.

In that regard, my delegation would like to reiterate its support for the role of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) — a body tasked with assisting Member States in the implementation of the CWC.

At the same time, to achieve the goal of ridding the world of chemical weapons, it is also imperative that the Organization's work strictly abide by the Convention. Its work, including investigations of alleged uses of chemical weapons, must be carried out in the most comprehensive, objective and impartial manner.

My delegation shares the concerns over the alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria. It is also troubling to see the reported information on the possession and use of chemical weapons by armed groups. To find a long-term solution to this protracted dossier, we believe that there is no other viable way than to promote dialogue and cooperation between the OPCW and Syria.

In the ninety-fourth monthly report of the OPCW Director-General (S/2021/692, annex), we note with encouragement that there will be an in-person meeting to be scheduled between the Foreign Minister and Head

of the National Authority of Syria and the Director-General of the OPCW. We hope that this important meeting could be considered a chance to narrow the differences and step up efforts towards finding a lasting solution.

We call on the Syrian National Authority and the OPCW Technical Secretariat to deepen their technical cooperation in the most constructive and non-politicized manner possible. The settlement of the remaining issues relating to the initial declaration — the first obligation of a State party under the CWC — continues to be one of the determining factors.

The international community should support efforts to promote dialogue, as well as efforts to realize the full implementation of the CWC and resolution 2118 (2013). Unity is required in order to do so. With constructive engagement, the Council reached a unanimous decision on a Syria cross-border humanitarian aid mechanism (resolution 2585 (2021)). We hope that this spirit continues and brings about further progress in settling this issue conclusively.

Mrs. Broadhurst Estival (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to join my colleagues in wishing you, Mr. President, every success in your presidency of the Council for the month of August. We pledge our full support and I thank all the members of the Council for their support of the French presidency during the month of July.

I would also like to thank Mr. Markram for his briefing and would like to make three points on this issue.

First, I note from the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Director-General's ninety-fourth report (S/2021/692, annex) that Syria continues to evade its international obligations. No answers have been given to the 20 outstanding questions related to Syria's initial declaration and additional questions continue to accumulate. The unauthorized movement and destruction of two chlorine cylinders linked to the Douma attacks is of great concern. The regime must promptly provide the OPCW Technical Secretariat with accurate information on this incident.

Secondly, I wish to recall that the decision taken in April by the OPCW Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention is not irreversible, as noted by Mr. Markram. It is up to the regime to act if

it wishes to regain its rights and privileges. Without its cooperation, the measures taken will remain in force.

In that regard, I note that the two most recent requests for the deployment of the Declaration Assessment Team have gone unanswered. The Syrian regime is expected to issue the visas for the OPCW Director-General's next deployment request. We hope that the upcoming meeting between the Director-General and the Syrian Minister for Foreign Affairs will resolve that issue and restore dialogue.

Finally, the use of these shocking weapons cannot go unpunished. Legal proceedings will take place, including before national courts. Evidence is still being collected and will be used. This is about respect for the victims, for whom justice must be done. This is the message we are delivering with our partners, in particular within the International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons.

Mr. Lipand (Estonia): I join others in thanking France for their presidency of the Security Council in July and wish India all the best with its presidency now in August.

I would like to thank Mr. Markram for his briefing and for the opportunity to discuss the latest updates on progress in the elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme. Unfortunately, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Director-General's ninety-fourth report (S/2021/692, annex) on progress in the elimination of the chemical weapons in Syria does not, in fact, reflect much progress. The deployment of the Declaration Assessment Team was scheduled to take place in May, but is, regrettably, still on hold due to the lack of response by Syria.

The steps taken by the Syrian regime in addressing the identified gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies in the initial declaration remain clearly unsatisfactory. This lack of progress continues to pose a threat to the Syrian people and to international peace and security.

I would like to reiterate the importance of accountability. It is of the utmost importance for the Security Council to provide a clear and united response to the outcomes of the independent and professional investigations by the Joint Investigative Mechanism and the Investigation and Identification Team. Holding those responsible to account and ensuring justice to the victims is needed to prevent such attacks from happening again. The Security Council needs to take

clear steps in fulfilling its mandate and implementing its resolutions. The use of a weapon of mass destruction by anyone, anywhere is not and cannot become acceptable.

I would also like to reiterate Estonia's full support to the professional and impartial work of the OPCW and its Technical Secretariat. The organization has demonstrated full dedication and integrity in fulfilling its task of upholding the norm against the use of chemical weapons. We call on the Syrian regime to cooperate fully with the OPCW Technical Secretariat and its investigative mechanisms.

Finally, 20 August will mark one year since the poisoning of Mr. Navalny with a chemical nerve agent of the Novichok group. It is unacceptable that the circumstances of this poisoning still remain unclear. We continue to call on the Russian Federation to disclose, fully and in a transparent manner, all circumstances of the incident and to inform the Security Council accordingly.

Mr. Sun Zhiqiang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): At the outset, the Chinese delegation would like to thank France for the important work done during its presidency of the Security Council in July, and I congratulate India on assuming the presidency of the Council this month. I would also like to thank Mr. Thomas Markram, Deputy to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, for his briefing.

China took note of the ninety-fourth monthly report (S/2021/692, annex) submitted by the Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). Regrettably, like numerous previous reports, this report has yet to provide a professional, scientific and convincing response to the issue of technical gaps in investigative procedures and the chain of custody in relevant reports on the Syrian chemical-weapons issue. That will inevitably damage the professional image of the OPCW Technical Secretariat and the impartiality and credibility of relevant reports. China once again calls on the Technical Secretariat to use science and facts as the criteria for the Syrian chemical-weapons investigation, maintain a comprehensive, objective and impartial attitude, demonstrate professionalism and expertise and provide a clear and direct response to the concerns of the international community as soon as possible.

Recently, consensus has been reached between Syrian Foreign Minister Mekdad and Director-General Arias on holding in-person meetings, and the

OPCW Damascus office has also completed a staff rotation. China welcomes these positive developments and supports the two sides in conducting in-depth discussions on working methods and procedures during face-to-face meetings to create conditions for more effective cooperation going forward.

China expresses serious concerns about the air strike on a declared chemical-weapons facility in Syria by a relevant country, thereby damaging the physical evidence of the Douma incident. Currently, the Technical Secretariat is communicating with the Syrian authorities with regard to such issues as the movement of two chlorine cylinders. Until the investigation on the movement of those cylinders reaches clear results, China calls on all parties to remain calm, exercise restraint and avoid recriminations and political interference.

In recent years, the OPCW has continued to show a worrying tendency towards increased politicization. Division and confrontation are replacing consultation and cooperation. There are more and more votes driven by political motives, and the spirit of consensus has been depleted. That does not help the OPCW perform its functions under the Chemical Weapons Convention. China calls on the United Nations Secretariat and the OPCW Technical Secretariat to take effective measures as soon as possible in order to push the parties to strengthen dialogue and cooperation, return to the tradition of consensus and putting true multilateralism into practice in order to effectively safeguard the authority and integrity of the Convention and advance the final resolution of the Syrian chemical-weapons issue.

Mr. Kvalheim (Norway): I will start by joining others in thanking France for an excellent presidency of the Security Council in the month of July. I wish India every success in its presidency for the month of August. You can count on our support, Mr. President, for your work.

I would also like to thank the Deputy to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Mr. Markram, for his briefing on the monthly report towards the full elimination of the Syrian chemical-weapons programme.

It is discouraging to note yet again that very little progress has been made regarding the elimination of chemical weapons in Syria. The Syrian Arab Republic must fulfil its obligations in accordance with the Chemical Weapons Convention and resolution 2118 (2013).

We note the recent exchange of correspondence between Director-General Arias and Syrian Foreign Minister Mekdad regarding a proposed in-person meeting to discuss relevant developments and a way forward regarding the Secretariat's mandated activities in the Syrian Arab Republic. Furthermore, we are pleased to see that the issue of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) staff member's visa has been resolved. We regret, however, that it took so long to do so.

It is troubling to note that two chlorine cylinders related to the chemical-weapon incident that took place in Douma in 2018 have been moved from where investigators last inspected them. That is despite the Secretariat's advice to not open, move or alter the containers or their contents without the consent of the Secretariat. We echo the OPCW in requesting the Syrian Arab Republic to provide all relevant information regarding the movement, and any remains of, the cylinders.

Similarly, it is disappointing to hear that the deployment of the Declaration Assessment Team has been postponed for nearly three months now. Regular consultations are vital to maintaining consistent cooperation, exchanges of information and technical assistance. It is urgent that this issue be resolved.

Norway urges Syria to fully cooperate with the OPCW and provide sufficient technical information or explanations to close out the 20 outstanding issues. It is critical that Syria complete the necessary measures in order to lift the suspension of its rights and privileges as a State party to the Chemical Weapons Convention.

We cannot continue to allow the international norm against the use of chemical weapons to erode.

Let me conclude by reiterating Norway's steadfast confidence in the work of Director-General Arias, the Technical Secretariat of the OPCW and their commitment to ensuring that upholding this vital norm is a priority.

The President: I shall now deliver this statement in my capacity as the representative of India.

I thank the Deputy to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Mr. Thomas Markram, for today's briefing. I also welcome the representatives of Syria and Iran to today's meeting.

We have taken note of the contents of the latest, ninety-fourth monthly report of the Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) (S/2021/692, annex). We note that the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Syria has agreed to the proposal of the Director-General on convening an in-person meeting, which will help in addressing and clarifying concerns with regard to the OPCW's mandated activities. In that context, Syria's positive response to that proposal is a step in the right direction.

We also take note of the fact that the twenty-fifth round of the Declaration Assessment Team related bilateral consultations, originally scheduled to take place on 18 May in Damascus, has not yet taken place. We encourage Syria to continue its engagement and cooperation with the OPCW so as to resolve all pending issues expeditiously.

India views the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) as a unique, non-discriminatory disarmament instrument that serves as a model for the elimination of an entire category of weapons of mass destruction. We attach high importance to the CWC and stand for its full, effective and non-discriminatory implementation. We support collective efforts by all to ensure that the credibility and integrity of the Convention is maintained to the fullest.

India is against the use of chemical weapons by anybody, anywhere, at any time and under any circumstances. India has consistently maintained that any investigation into the use of chemical weapons must be impartial, credible and objective, following scrupulously the provisions and procedures embedded in the Convention, and in conformity with the delicate balance of power and responsibility enshrined under it to establish facts and reach evidence-based conclusions. We encourage the OPCW to strictly adhere to those parameters.

Since we joined the Council in January, India has been repeatedly cautioning against the possibility of terrorist entities and individuals gaining access to chemical weapons. We are concerned at the frequent reports of the resurgence of terrorist groups in the region. As we have learned from the consequences of complacency against terrorism in the past, the international community cannot afford to ignore terrorist activities in Syria and the region.

When the Council came together last month by unanimously voting in favour of resolution 2585 (2021),

we showed the world that progress on the Syria file, even after a decade of conflict and impasse, is still possible, provided we were all willing to take that extra step and work in tandem while taking cognizance of each other's concerns. Let us show the same resolve with regard to the chemical-weapons discussions.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

The representative of the Russian Federation has asked for the floor to make a further statement,

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I have asked for the floor once again only to express my surprise at the stance taken by our Western colleagues in connection with the incident involving an air strike and cylinders related to the incident in Douma. I already spoke about this in my main statement, so I just want to once again say that as we expected, a number of Council members are disregarding the fact that a certain third party destroyed that evidence and that there were many questions in that respect concerning the quality of the work being done by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). Syria had no reason to seek their destruction, not if we view the matter following basic common sense.

In fact, Damascus had every reason to be concerned about the integrity of those cylinders if they were transferred to The Hague after OPCW experts failed to protect the phosphorus trichloride samples during the twenty-second round of consultations, in October 2019. Those samples mysteriously vanished; that happened in a certified OPCW laboratory. I want to remind everyone of that and note that the Secretariat never found out the reason for the disappearance; in fact, it covered up that disappearance for several months.

I wish also to touch on the statement of my Estonian colleague, who mentioned the so-called poisoning of Mr. Navalny. We are already used to the fact that our Estonian colleagues sometimes have delayed reactions to certain facts and events, so I should like to recall, if he has not yet noticed, that the story concerning the so-called poisoning of Mr. Navalny long ago became toxic not for Russia but for our Western colleagues, who continue to fail to respond to all of our questions. Therefore, raising this issue, I think, does not work to his advantage at this point, and I would advise him to tell his colleagues in Tallinn to update their playbooks. Time marches on.

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

Mr. Sabbagh (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, and your friendly country on presiding over the Council this month. We are fully confident that your wise stewardship will bring success to the work of the Council.

It is deplorable that the Council's debates have become a platform for some Member States to level false and misleading accusations against my country, which we totally reject. We have repeatedly stressed our condemnation of the use of chemical weapons and note that we have fulfilled our obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention. My delegation notes the total disregard on the part of those countries of the fact that the Syrian Arab Republic voluntarily joined the Chemical Weapons Convention in 2013 and that it has worked seriously, honestly and transparently to fulfil its obligations under the Convention. That has led to unprecedented success in the total destruction of its stockpile of chemical weapons and production facilities.

It has become clear that those countries seek to ignore the cooperation of recent years between Syria and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the close consultations with its Technical Secretariat that have led to important progress, demonstrating that Syria has fulfilled its obligations under the Convention. Only a few technical aspects remain outstanding in this process. However, we continue to witness repeated attempts by the same countries to use those technical aspects to serve their own political purposes.

In its ninety-second monthly report (EC-98/P/NAT.1, dated 16 July 2021), Syria reiterates that, since joining the OPCW, it has been keen to cooperate with the Technical Secretariat. Regrettably, Syria's eight years of cooperation have been totally disregarded by the Technical Secretariat.

In that regard, I would like to point out that the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Syrian Arab Republic welcomed the 24 June invitation by the Director-General of the OPCW to a high-level meeting for an exchange of views. I would also like to state that, on 6 July, the Minister expressed a willingness to meet with him in person in Damascus, at a date convenient for the Director-General. The goal would be to exchange views, discuss the relevant

developments pertaining to mechanisms and working methods and agree on the way forward, in line with Syria's upholding its obligations under the Convention.

Syria fully rejects the campaigns launched by some countries that call into question its cooperation with the OPCW while they level false accusations against Syria's initial declaration. We condemn the fact that those countries jump to false conclusions, especially as some of the technical aspects being discussed are related to divergent scientific interpretations, which cannot be resolved swiftly or selectively.

My delegation condemns allegations in the statements of the representatives of certain States that Syria denied entry visas to the members of the Declaration Assessment Team. My delegation notes that the Team has conducted 24 rounds of consultations in Syria so far. In none of those rounds has there ever been an issue related to entry visas. We would like members to know that, so far, the two parties have not agreed on a date for the next visit of the Declaration Assessment Team. It was so regrettable to hear the Director-General of the OPCW say, in his June briefing in this Chamber (see S/PV.8785), that the deployment of the Team would be postponed, owing to the elevated summer temperatures in Syria.

Addressing chemical terrorism presents a real challenge. However, it begs the question as to why that challenge is of no interest to some Western countries. The increased number of attempts by some terrorist groups, including Da'esh, Al-Nusra and other terrorist groups affiliated with Al-Qaida, such as the White Helmets, to use toxic chemical weapons and materials in Syria is not of concern to any of these countries. The same holds true with regard to those groups' new charade, whereby they use chemical weapons and accuse the Syrian Arab Army of using them. That does not seem to warrant action by those States. In that regard, I note that the armed terrorist groups continue their attacks every now and then against civilians and the Syrian Arab Army forces in rural Homs, Hama, Latakia and Idlib through the use of missiles, artillery and drones, which makes the security situation in those areas relatively unstable.

We daily continue to learn facts pertaining to the OPCW report about the alleged Douma incident, which clearly demonstrate that the high-level officials of the OPCW have distorted the facts to correspond to the narrative of the United States, France and Britain in

order to justify their tripartite aggression against the sovereignty and territorial Integrity of Syria.

In his June briefing before the Council, the Director-General of the OPCW, Mr. Arias, attempted to undermine the credibility of the work done in the original report about the investigation of the Douma incident, where no evidence was found proving that there was a chemical attack there. His attempt will not succeed in restoring the credibility of the reports of the Fact-Finding Mission. The Director-General's dodging and ignoring information and facts will not invalidate the truth that there are questions that must be answered and that there is a need to fixing deficiencies in the Mission's working methods. The OPCW Director-General's resolve to ignore many facts and substantiated scientific observations made by recognized experts is not the right way to demonstrate the professionalism of the work of the OPCW teams.

Concerning the two cylinders related to the alleged Douma incident mentioned in the latest report of the Director-General (S/2021/692, annex) and noted in the statements of certain representatives, I would like to clarify the following points.

First, on 8 June, one of the previously declared sites was subjected to a brutal Israeli attack, which led to the complete destruction of many rooms, fire extinguishers, vehicles and the two chlorine cylinders involved in the alleged Douma incident. Unfortunately, the report of the Director-General and the statements made by representatives of certain countries here have ignored and failed to condemn that attack, while remaining focused only on some technical aspects

Secondly, in November 2020, the OPCW investigative team requested that the cylinders be relocated to the OPCW headquarters. At the time, the Syrian National Authority indicated that they could not be shipped outside Syrian territory, as they are subject to a judicial investigation. The two cylinders constitute legal physical evidence in connection with the alleged incident in which terrorists used chemical weapons, resulting in the killing of innocent civilians.

Thirdly, in its note dated 18 May 2018, the OPCW Technical Secretariat informed the Syrian Arab Republic that the two cylinders should be preserved pending a scientific and technical examination. In November 2020, a group of experts from the Technical Secretariat conducted such an assessment, which sought to determine measurements, content,

quantity, metal density, chemical stability, radiography and photography. Syria has therefore fully upheld its obligations in compliance with the Technical Secretariat note. The Technical Secretariat has not requested Syria to do any further action.

The disease of politicization suffered by the OPCW has alienated it from the technical nature of its work and made it lose much of its credibility. Instead of being an honest guardian of the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention, it has become a tool for some countries to target a State party to the Convention. It must therefore be restored to the right track and return to play its normal role as a key and unbiased pillar in the non-proliferation regime of chemical weapons.

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

Ms. Ershadi (Islamic Republic of Iran): I sincerely congratulate you, Mr. President, on presiding over the Security Council this month, and assure you of our full support.

The Islamic Republic of Iran once again reaffirms the importance of preserving the authority of the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). That, indeed, requires the full, effective and non-discriminatory implementation of the Convention, as well as the impartial, independent and professional work of the OPCW. Those are of extreme importance with regard to the application of the Convention to Syria.

As we have said time and again, the issue has unfortunately been politicized by a certain group of countries, resulting in the undermining of the Convention and its effective implementation, as well as of the credibility of the OPCW. In addition, we missed the opportunity to properly address the issue over the past several years. Nevertheless, it is never too late to mend. In that context, we positively note the invitation extended by the OPCW Director-General to the Foreign Minister of Syria to communicate at a high level. We also acknowledge the fact that the Syrian Foreign Minister has welcomed that invitation and expressed his readiness to meet with the Director-General of the OPCW in Damascus at any time he deems appropriate. The objective of such a high-level meeting would be to discuss relevant working methods and modalities and, ultimately, to agree on the steps that must be taken by the Syrian Arab Republic in the implementation of its obligations under the Convention.

The Islamic Republic of Iran once again recognizes the very serious efforts made by the Syrian Arab Republic over the past several years in implementing its obligations as a State party to the Convention. We also acknowledge the cooperation of that country with the OPCW, despite restrictions imposed by war and threats by terrorist groups, not to mention the coronavirus disease pandemic. Supporting the new approach of the OPCW and Syria to conducting high-level dialogue, we encourage both sides to engage constructively in the process. It is also obvious that the success of the process requires a calm political atmosphere, whose preservation is the responsibility of international community. Furthermore, supporting the process can ultimately lead to overcoming the current challenges in the Syrian chemical dossier that cannot be addressed otherwise.

As a major victim in contemporary history of the most systematic use of chemical weapons, Iran again condemns in the strongest possible terms the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere and under any circumstances. We also call for the universality of the Convention and, in that context, stress that the Israeli regime must be compelled to immediately accede to the Convention.

Finally, the Islamic Republic of Iran stands ready to actively and constructively contribute to realizing the objective of the Convention and to promoting the authority of the OPCW.

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

The meeting rose at 11.35 a.m.