



OPCW

Conference of the States Parties

Twenty-Sixth Session
29 November – 3 December 2021

C-26/NAT.45
29 November 2021
ENGLISH and FRENCH only

FRANCE

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR LUIS VASSY
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE FRENCH REPUBLIC TO THE OPCW
AT THE TWENTY-SIXTH SESSION
OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES
UNDER AGENDA ITEM 9(D)**

Mr Chairperson,

Eight years. It has now been eight years since Syria joined the Chemical Weapons Convention (“the Convention”), eight years since Syria committed to no longer use these horrendous weapons, and eight years since Syria submitted its initial declaration. And yet the facts are the facts. And they are irrefutable.

Despite its international commitments, the use of chemical weapons in Syria has been confirmed on multiple occasions, both by the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism and by the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission. In 2020 and 2021, the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) meticulously documented the responsibility of the Syrian regime in the attacks in Ltamenah in March 2017 and in Saraqib in February 2018.

Faced with these attacks, we chose to respond with the law. That is why these repeated incidents of chemical weapons use led us to take a historic decision last April in The Hague. The Syrian regime’s crimes and lies can no longer remain without consequence. That is why the Conference of the States Parties (“the Conference”) did the responsible thing at its Twenty-Fifth Session by adopting, by a very large majority, the decision “Addressing the Possession and Use of Chemical Weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic”, which was put forward by my delegation on behalf of 46 States Parties.

This decision is a strong signal to the international community, and it reaffirms that the use of these weapons is fundamentally unacceptable. The decision is crucial to deterring anyone from continuing to use these weapons. An international Convention cannot be violated without consequence. The contrary would only encourage others to violate it. The measures taken are proportionate and justified. This is about preserving the Convention, which is a pillar of our collective security.

The perpetrators of this heinous act constituted by the use of chemical weapons must be brought to justice. As we have already emphasised, the OPCW is not a tribunal. Prosecutions will take place elsewhere. And this is necessary: the perpetrators of such crimes cannot go unpunished. We owe it to the Syrian victims of these attacks.



The measures contained in the decision of April 2021 are reversible. But it is up to Syria to provide the requested information and to meet its international obligations, in order to recover some of its rights and privileges at the OPCW.

To date, Syria has decided not to cooperate or to considerably slow down its cooperation with the Technical Secretariat (“the Secretariat”). The statement given by the Ambassador of Estonia on behalf of 56 States Parties, which we co-signed, describes this particularly alarming situation, which we must take seriously.

Clearly, the Syrian regime does not wish to cooperate. That is unacceptable. We would recall that this obligation to cooperate is laid down both in paragraph 7 of Article VII of the Convention that Syria joined, and in resolution 2118 (2013), which requires that OPCW and United Nations staff be granted immediate and unfettered access to all sites on its territory that are deemed relevant.

Regarding Syria’s initial declaration, questions have been raised from the very beginning about its completeness and accuracy. More than eight years later, numerous questions still remain outstanding, including with regard to the declaration of chemical warfare agents and chemical weapons production facilities.

We should like to go back to Syria’s note verbale of 9 July 2021 transmitted to all States Parties, which reports the destruction of two chlorine cylinders relating to the incident in Douma. We are deeply concerned about this destruction. The two chlorine cylinders had been stored at another site, some 60 km away, while awaiting transfer to OPCW Headquarters. After the refusal to transfer these cylinders to OPCW Headquarters in November 2020, these cylinders were purportedly moved to another location, without any notification to the Secretariat. We call on Syria to explain this matter.

We also call on Syria to provide members of the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) with access to its territory upon the next request for deployment by the Director-General, in line with its obligations under the Convention and resolution 2118 (2013).

Finally, we call on Syria to provide all information and documents requested by the Secretariat and to update its initial declaration.

We welcome the Director-General’s willingness to engage a high-level dialogue with the Syrian Minister of Foreign Affairs. We hope that this meeting will take place and that it will restore a channel of constructive communication and resolve the issue of the denied visa.

We once again commend the seriousness, professionalism, and independence of the Secretariat’s teams that are working on the Syrian chemical dossier.

I would ask that this statement be considered as an official document of this session of the Conference and that it be published on the OPCW’s public website and on Catalyst.