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**STATEMENT OF THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF SYRIA
H.E. ASAAD HASAN AL-SHAIBANI
AT THE 108TH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Esteemed Chairperson,
Your Excellency the Director General,
Distinguished Members of the Executive Council,
and Honourable Delegates,

Peace be upon those who lost their lives to suffocation by chemical weapons at the hands of the Assad regime.

I speak here today not only as Syria's Foreign Minister but as a representative of a nation and people that have endured profound suffering under the shadow of chemical weapons by those who were entrusted with their protection—a shadow that we did not cast, but are now resolute in dispelling.

The Assad regime's chemical weapons programme represents one of the darkest chapters in both Syria and the world's history.

It is impossible to discuss this legacy without recalling the atrocities perpetrated. The harrowing images of children, lifeless and lined up, victims of one of the most heinous crimes imaginable, haunt us to this day. These acts of inhumanity remain a profound violation of the universal norms we are here to uphold.

But the harm extended beyond these immediate horrors. The recurring use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime, as documented by the hard work of this secretariat supported by resolute member states, emboldened non-state actors like ISIS to also employ chemical weapons to further terrorise communities.

The consequences of the regime's actions rippled across our country and beyond, destabilising the region and undermining what was a universal norm.

The Assad regime also manipulated international organisations, including your very own, our very own, wasting valuable resources and funding meant to advance global chemical weapons disarmament.

Your Excellencies,

I stand here to tell you, the norm is once more universal. This era of deceit persisted for far too long.



Today, I assure you, this will end.

The new Syrian government that I represent here today is determined to rebuild Syria's future on a foundation of transparency, justice and cooperation with the international community.

This chemical weapons programme created under the Assad era is not our programme. The documented use by the OPCW is not our use. The legal obligations resulting from breaches are ones we inherited, not created.

Nevertheless, our commitment is to dismantle whatever may be left from it, to put an end to this painful legacy and ensure Syria becomes a nation aligned with international norms.

But moving ahead with something you are not responsible for nor comprehend is no easy task.

The secret nature of the programme, the collapse of the Assad regime, and the subsequent aerial strikes conducted by Israel on December 9, a day after the regime fell, all create additional challenges to the logistical, technical, and practical ones.

These strikes targeted military facilities, including sites suspected by the international community of housing remnants of the chemical weapons programme. As a result, there remains uncertainty about chemical weapons that may still exist within Syria.

The Assad regime's programme was secret and led at the highest level, compounded by the fact that many former personnel associated with the chemical weapons programme have fled and are nowhere to be found, and we suspect they took any documentation of it with them.

We lack the information, expertise, technical capacity, and human resources to fully assess and address any chemical weapons that may still exist.

Notwithstanding all these immense challenges for something we inherited, we have taken concrete steps to begin the process.

First, even before the fall of the Assad regime, during the battles of liberation, we issued public commitments that whatever we may find linked to chemical weapons, we will secure.

Second, despite the unprecedented domestic and global challenges upon us, the OPCW is the only multilateral forum where we have worked with a friendly and global actor, Qatar, to represent our interests in the interim and act as a channel of communication in the few days after the fall of the regime and liberation of Syria.

This showed our commitment to not leave a gap on this issue.

Third, a few days after that, we welcomed the Director-General and his team to a historic visit to Damascus. The President himself met the delegation, which, in the case of the Director-General and Investigation and Identification team, was the first time for them in Syria.

Fourth, and immediately afterwards, we acted upon the plan presented to us by the Director-General and began a process to allocate a focal point—someone who has worked with many of you in the past in dealing with the Assad era chemical weapons programme.

Fifth, within three working days, the focal point was in this very building having conservative meetings with a determinant and supportive technical secretariat to devise an action plan.

And a few days from that day, ladies and gentlemen, I am speaking here to you today, signalling commitment at the highest level, and gladly announcing that mission planning has begun together with the secretariat for operational trips to Damascus which are happening very soon.

Excellencies,

Although the Assad regime stalled for many years, we understand the need to act quickly, but we also understand that this needs to be done thoroughly. For that, we cannot succeed alone.

I would like to thank the states who offered their support yesterday, to Syria and the Technical Secretariat in the Chemical Weapons file. This support is greatly appreciated, and we are ready to move the file forwards with the assistance provided.

Syria is ready if with incredibly difficult challenges, and within our capacity to solve this decades-old problem imposed on us by a previous regime.

The context we find ourselves in is most challenging and will require a collective effort to resolve. We ask the international community, headed by the OPCW, to work with us, on making this happen within what we have available.

We urgently need immense international support from member states and the OPCW, in the form of information, coordination groups here in the Hague, technical assistance, logistical assistance, capacity building, resources, and expertise on the ground.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Accountability is essential. The OPCW has been a vital ally in addressing this legacy. Its unwavering commitment to upholding the Chemical Weapons Convention has provided a path toward justice and accountability.

These efforts have been instrumental in uncovering the truth and identifying those responsible for the use of chemical weapons.

We deeply value the work of the Joint Investigative Team, Fact Finding Mission, and Investigation and Identification team, and the other mechanisms tasked with ensuring perpetrators are held accountable.

We also commend the countries that have taken the initiative under their own domestic jurisdictions to prosecute individuals involved, issuing arrest warrants for these heinous crimes.

Such actions represent a vital contribution to justice and set an important precedent.

We are deeply encouraged by the collaborative spirit of the nations that have come together in a working group formed in June last year, coming from diverse regions, to advance proposals for an international framework to prosecute the use of chemical weapons.

This collective commitment to accountability underscores the strength of multilateralism in addressing global challenges and ensuring that perpetrators cannot escape justice.

The victims of these crimes—our people—have suffered not only the direct horrors of chemical weapons but also the enduring impact of disinformation and misinformation. Survivors, despite their immense pain, have shown tremendous courage by providing evidence and pressing for justice.

Their efforts have led to significant milestones, such as the arrest warrant issued by France against the former president for chemical weapons use.

Domestically and internationally, we will be doing our best to ensure the perpetrators of these unimaginable crimes are held to account, that justice is achieved for the victims, and that solid international standards are established to prevent the recurrence of such atrocities in the future.

Excellencies,

It is also unimaginable that the victims and survivors of chemical weapons, as well as the Syrian nation as a whole, continue to suffocate—not only for the past use of chemical weapons and the denial of truth but now under economic sanctions that date back to the Assad regime era.

These sanctions deny Syrians the ability to restore their lives and hinder our nation's economic recovery.

Not only do they create an environment that empowers criminal networks and adds to instability, but they also, as noted by OPCW leadership, have a practical impact on the organisation's ability to operate in Syria with speed and institutional ease.

These sanctions are obsolete. They no longer serve any purpose in the current context and instead pose significant barriers to Syria's recovery.

For the sake of justice, stability, practicality, and reinstalling faith between our people and the international community they were abandoned by, they must be lifted immediately.

Excellencies,

Today, I stand before you at a historic juncture of a new journey free from Assad's chemical weapon era.

This journey will be challenging, but we undertake it with determination and transparency.

By addressing this council today, I signal Syria's unwavering commitment that, with your support, a universal norm can once more be reestablished.

Together, we can write a new chapter—not just for Syria and its victims, but for the entire global community.

Mercy to those who have fallen to these horrific weapons, patience to those who mourn them, and strength to all of us in the road ahead.

Thank you.