



**Briefing to the Security Council on the Situation in the Middle East (Syria)**

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Mr. President, distinguished Members of the Security Council,

Thank you for the opportunity to brief you again on the implementation of Security Council resolution 2118 (2013), on the elimination of the chemical weapons programme of the Syrian Arab Republic.

The Office for Disarmament Affairs has been in regular contact with the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) on this matter. I spoke to the OPCW Director-General this past Thursday, 1 November, and look forward to seeing him in two weeks, when I travel to The Hague to deliver a message on behalf of the Secretary-General at the opening of the Review Conference of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Mr. President,

In the past month, there have been some new developments related to this file. In other areas, there has been little change.

Efforts to clarify the outstanding issues regarding the initial declaration of the Syrian Arab Republic remain as previously informed. Following the OPCW's analysis of the information provided to it by Syria on 10 July, the Director-General wrote a letter to the Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister, dated 28 September. The letter reiterated the need to resolve the outstanding issues and invited Syria to continue working to clarify the remaining gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies. This message has been underlined at working level meetings that have taken place between the OPCW and the Syrian National Authority.

In this context, I welcome the Director-General's news that the inspections at the Barzah and Jamrayah facilities are now underway. The conduct of these inspections is in accordance with the decision by the OPCW Executive Council at its 83<sup>rd</sup> session, which required the OPCW to carry out two yearly inspections of these sites.

Mr. President,

With regard to the OPCW's Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) in Syria and its work in relation to the alleged use of chemical weapons in Douma, the Director-General informed me that the FFM is close to drawing its conclusions and will be issuing the report in due course. As you do, I look forward to receiving the final report on this incident.

The FFM is also investigating five additional reported incidents brought to the attention of the Director-General by the National Authority of the Syrian Arab Republic: two incidents in Kharbit Masasnah on 7 July 2017 and 4 August 2017, respectively, one incident in Al-Salamiyah on 9 August 2017, one incident in Yarmouk, Damascus on 22 October 2017

and one in Souran on 8 November 2017. As of yet, there is no indication of when a report on these incidents is likely to be issued.

Mr. President,

At its fourth special session last June, the Conference of States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention, *inter alia*, decided that the OPCW Secretariat “shall put in place arrangements to identify the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic...in those instances in which the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission in Syria determines or has determined that use or likely use occurred, as well as cases for which the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism had not issued a report”.

The Director-General has now provided two progress reports in this regard to the Executive Council and to the Secretary-General. He continues to make progress in implementing the mandate given to him.

Mr. President, Distinguished Members of the Council,

Although five years have now passed since the adoption of resolution 2118 (2013), there is still work to be done before the resolution can be considered to have been fully implemented. Moreover, so long as the use of chemical weapons is ongoing, or the threat of their use lingers, we must retain our focus on this issue and not allow ourselves to become inured to it. Unity in the Security Council is required, if we are – collectively – to re-establish the norm against chemical weapons. The vitality and credibility of the broader disarmament and non-proliferation architecture depends upon it. The use of these weapons must always be seen as a violation of a deeply-held taboo. Accordingly, the identification and accountability of those responsible is imperative.

Relatedly, and before closing, I note that allegations regarding a possible planned use of chemical weapons in Idlib are continuing to surface. The Secretary-General has made clear his concern regarding the continued use of chemical weapons, as well as regarding “the risks of a humanitarian catastrophe in the event of a full-scale military operation in Idlib province.” He has called upon “all parties to exercise restraint.” Allow me to underscore, once again, the vital importance of upholding humanitarian principles, and the Chemical Weapons Convention, in Syria.

I thank you for your attention.