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FRANCE

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR PHILIPPE LALLIOT
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF FRANCE TO THE OPCW AT THE
FIFTY-EIGHTH MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairperson,
Mr Director-General,
Ambassadors,

France supports the statement of the European Union. Allow me to add to it the following observations, in my national capacity.

Today, we are once more gathered to discuss the situation in Syria and the use of chemical weapons in that country. More specifically, we are here to discuss, again, the use of chemical weapons by the government and armed forces of Syria.

Let us first of all recall that, in 2013, after the Ghouta sarin gas attack, which had already caused several hundreds of deaths, it was under international pressure that the Syrian Government finally joined the OPCW. Then, it made a formal commitment to declare all its stockpiles and never to use chemical weapons again.

Five years later, at Douma, on 7 April, after Ghouta, after Kafr Zita, after Talmenes, after Khan Shaykhun, to name but some, the Syrian Government once more demonstrated that it would not respect its international commitments. It has shown that it would stoop to any level, gassing its own population, civilians, women and children, killing several dozen people, and injuring hundreds of others.

The Syrian Government's repeated, organised and systematic recourse to chemical weapons follows a *modus operandi*, which, lamentably, is well known and thoroughly documented. This chemical policy of the Bashar Al-Assad regime is causing a trivialisation of the use of chemical weapons which we cannot accept. It is undermining the regime of chemical non-proliferation that we have all been building together since World War II.

The chemical escalation of Bashar Al-Assad's regime breaches the very foundations of international humanitarian law and the resolutions of the United Nations Security Council. This is a war crime, and, in the words of the United Nations Secretary General in 2013, a crime against humanity within the meaning of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.



The Bashar Al-Assad regime's chemical policy thus constitutes one of the most flagrant and serious violations of all the norms that safeguard our collective security. As such, it represents a grave threat to peace and international security, and has a direct bearing upon our national security.

The facts are before us and will not go away. They are resistant to the grossest of lies and the most absurd denials: the Technical Secretariat of the OPCW has proved over and over again that chemical weapons were used in Syria and also that Syria has failed to declare the whole capacity of its chemical military programme.

The findings of the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism, the JIM, have clearly established the responsibility of the Syrian Government and armed forces *inter alia* for the use of chemical weapons. So let us be clear: if Syria has continued to use toxic substances for military purposes, then it has retained its capacity to produce and use them, in contravention of its international commitments, and despite the guarantees offered by the Russian Federation in the framework of the Russo-American accord of 2013. As we all know now, Syria has been conducting a clandestine chemical programme since 2013. Our priority must now be to provide the Technical Secretariat with the means to complete the dismantling of the Syrian programme and to guarantee to the States Parties that the 2013 commitments will be respected.

At this point, I should like to issue a solemn warning against any attempt at manipulation, exploitation and disinformation: having told us yesterday that this attack had been carried out by the opposition, the Russian Federation *inter alia* tells us one day that there has been no attack at all, the next that it was carried out by armed groups, and, the day after that, that it had been orchestrated by the West. There is no thought of coherence in this, the only objective being to sow doubt and confusion, without seeking the truth.

We had already heard similar nonsense in connection with the Ghouta attack, in August 2013, and later in connection with Khan Shaykhun, although it was scientifically proven that Syrian forces had indeed perpetrated a sarin attack there.

These manoeuvres are so crude that they would be laughable if they did not relate to a population that has been ravaged, terrorised, and victimised for seven years. These lies are, in fact, obscene. France will continue here, elsewhere, everywhere, to oppose their propagation by recalling the facts and by revealing the deep-lying mechanisms at work.

This attitude of the Syrian Government, which this Council criticised in its decision of 11 November 2016, and the impunity which has too long prevailed can no longer be tolerated. We have told the United Nations Security Council, and I repeat it here: by deciding once more to resort to chemical weapons, the Syrian regime reached, on 7 April, a point of no return. The name of Douma has joined those of Ypres, Halabja, Ghouta and Khan Shaykhun in the terrible litany of chemical massacres.

France has resolved to face its responsibilities to the international community and to History so that these horrors are never repeated.

Since May 2017, the President of the Republic has repeatedly charted the red line marking the proven, lethal use of chemical weapons. France has analysed all the data at its disposal, be they from open sources of information or from intelligence which it has chosen to declassify,

as it did in the wake of the Khan Shaykhun and Ghouta attacks. The conclusions of this national assessment, which we have decided to publish and which is available to all, leave no room for appeal.

France, therefore, considers it beyond any possible doubt that a chemical attack on civilians was carried out at Douma on 7 April 2018, and that the only plausible scenario is that Syrian armed forces were responsible, during a general offensive in eastern Ghouta. Syrian armed forces and security forces were responsible also for other actions in the region during this same offensive in 2017 and 2018.

The Russian Federation undeniably gave active military support to the operations to retake eastern Ghouta. Further, it offered constant political cover to the Syrian regime on the use of chemical weapons, both in the United Nations Security Council and in the OPCW, despite the contrary conclusions of the JIM. It even extended this support to the six-fold imposition of its veto on draft resolutions of the United Nations Security Council relating to the chemical problem, and again last Tuesday, to be sure that no truly professional, impartial mechanism would be able to investigate. When the findings of a truly independent investigation were no longer palatable, why not just cynically eliminate the JIM?

As a result, France and its American and British partners decided to carry out on 14 April successful targeted strikes against three military facilities sites on which some of the Syrian regime's chemical capacities were concentrated.

France's priorities in Syria have not changed. They are: to end the combat with Daesh, to gain access for humanitarian aid to the civilian populations, to build a collective momentum to reach a political settlement of the conflict, to enable Syria finally to find peace again, and to work in favour of the stability of the region.

The action which we undertook was a justified, proportionate response to an unacceptable situation. Its objective was not only to put an end to intolerable abuses and prevent their repetition, but also, more generally, to defend the multilateral system and chemical disarmament architecture, which are the guarantees of international peace and security.

The President of the Republic has recalled his determination to continue his efforts to prevent any hint of recidivism by the Syrian regime, achieve the establishment of an international mechanism to assign responsibilities, because we no longer have an allocation mechanism since the JIM disappeared last November, and to prevent impunity, thanks *inter alia* to the Partnership we launched last January.

It is part of our collective responsibility to put the multilateral system, to which we are all committed, back at the heart of the resolution of this conflict, which has lasted all too long. The OPCW has a special role to play, one commensurate with the hopes we have placed in it, the missions which we have entrusted to it, and the commitments which we assumed when joining the Convention of which the OPCW is guardian.

I should, at this point, thank the Director-General for his presentation on the work done by the FFM in Syria, and for his determination and leadership during recent years. We have every confidence in the independent, impartial and professional work of its teams, as they work all the while in difficult, dangerous circumstances. I should now like to renew, to all of them, our full support and complete confidence. France has been at your sides since the start

of this crisis, and intends to stay there. The FFM is going ahead with its work, as is proper, and we must examine together the conclusions to be drawn from its report, relating in particular to the exact nature of the toxic chemical agent used on 7 April.

We appeal to all who truly and deeply desire it to work together to put a definitive end to Syrian chemical escalation, to have respect established for the international order, its law and its institutions, to provide the OPCW, recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, with the resources to fulfil our hopes. Our three priorities are clear, they should be the priorities of all: to guarantee final destruction of Syria's entire clandestine chemical arsenal; to combat impunity and punish those responsible for the chemical attacks; to establish an independent, impartial mechanism for assigning blame for the attacks.

Silence alone is complicity and inaction a compromise. France rejects each of these. It is a matter of everyone's responsibility, as well as our collective responsibility. Let us work together respecting the Convention and keeping faith with its founding principles. It is a moral imperative *vis-à-vis* the population of Syria, a legal obligation as regards our commitments, and a political necessity in the eyes of History.

Thank you.

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