



Security Council

Seventy-eighth year

9372nd meeting

Tuesday, 11 July 2023, 11.10 a.m.

New York

Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Dame Barbara Woodward	(United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
<i>Members:</i>	Albania	Mr. Stastoli
	Brazil	Mr. Wazima Szatmari
	China	Mr. Sun Zhiqiang
	Ecuador	Mr. Montalvo Sosa
	France	Mr. Olmedo
	Gabon	Ms. Betoe Ndojombouet
	Ghana	Mr. Anyanah
	Japan	Mr. Hamamoto
	Malta	Mr. Ciscaldi
	Mozambique	Mr. Afonso
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Switzerland	Mrs. Chanda
	United Arab Emirates	Mr. Bastaki
	United States of America	Mr. DeLaurentis

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Letter dated 27 June 2023 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2023/484)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. *Corrections* should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room AB-0601 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (<http://documents.un.org>).



The meeting was called to order at 11.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Letter dated 27 June 2023 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2023/484)

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, the Syrian Arab Republic and Türkiye to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Adedeji Ebo, Deputy to the High Representative of the United Nations Office of 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/2023/484, which contains the text of a letter dated 27 June 2023 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council.

I give the floor to Mr. Ebo.

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

Since the last consideration of this matter by the Council (see S/PV.9317), and consistent with established practice, the Office for Disarmament Affairs has been in regular contact with its counterparts in the Technical Secretariat of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) on activities related to resolution 2118 (2013). Since the Council last met on this matter, the OPCW Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) has continued its efforts to clarify all outstanding issues regarding the initial declaration and subsequent declarations of the Syrian Arab Republic. Unfortunately, efforts by the OPCW Technical Secretariat to organize

the twenty-fifth round of consultations between the DAT and the Syrian National Authority continue to be unsuccessful.

As Council members were previously informed, the OPCW Technical Secretariat has provided the Syrian Arab Republic with the list of pending declarations and other documents requested by the DAT since 2019 that could assist in resolving the current 20 outstanding issues. The OPCW Technical Secretariat proposed, in May 2022, to address the declaration-related issues through exchange of correspondence. I have been advised that, although the Syrian Arab Republic agreed to that proposal, the OPCW Technical Secretariat has yet to receive from the Syrian Arab Republic any declarations or other documents requested. That includes the complete declaration of activities at the Scientific Studies and Research Centre (SSRC) and the declaration of quantities of nerve agents produced at one chemical weapons production facility that was declared by the Syrian Arab Republic as never having been used to produce chemical weapons.

Owing to this situation, and in a further attempt to implement its mandate, the OPCW Technical Secretariat proposed to deploy a reduced team comprised of several members of the DAT to the Syrian Arab Republic to conduct limited in-country activities. The first such deployment took place from 17 to 22 January, and the second took place from 12 to 19 April. The outcome of the first deployment was reported to the States parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention in March, and the outcomes of the second deployment will be reported to the OPCW Executive Council in due course.

The OPCW Technical Secretariat remains fully committed to implementing its mandate aimed at verifying the fulfilment of the Syrian Arab Republic's declaration obligations under the Convention, decisions by OPCW policymaking organs and resolution 2118 (2013). However, as has been previously emphasized, full cooperation by the Syrian Arab Republic with the OPCW Technical Secretariat is essential to closing all outstanding issues. Considering the identified gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies that remain unresolved, at this time the OPCW Technical Secretariat assesses that the declaration submitted by the Syrian Arab Republic still cannot be considered accurate and complete in accordance with the Chemical Weapons Convention.

With regard to the inspections of the Barzah and Jamrayah facilities of the SSRC, I have been advised that the OPCW Technical Secretariat continues to plan the next round of inspections, to be held in 2023. I regret to inform the Council 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 facilities of the SSRC in November 2018.

Regarding the unauthorized movement of the two cylinders related to the chemical weapon incident that took place in Douma on 7 April 2018, which were allegedly destroyed in an attack on a chemical weapons production facility, the OPCW Technical Secretariat is still awaiting information related to the unauthorized movement of those cylinders. I again call upon the Syrian Arab Republic to respond with urgency to all of the OPCW Technical Secretariat's requests.

With regard to the invitation extended by the OPCW Director-General to the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Syrian Arab Republic to an in-person meeting, I note that the OPCW Technical Secretariat stands ready to engage further on an agreed agenda for the meeting through the agreed channel.

It is my understanding that the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) continues to provide support to the OPCW fact-finding mission in Syria in accordance with the tripartite agreement concluded among OPCW, UNOPS and the Syrian Arab Republic. The current extension of the agreement remained in force up to and including 30 June. As of the date of the most recent OPCW report (see S/2023/484), the finalization of the new extension of that agreement was in progress.

I have been advised that the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) continues to study all available information related to allegations of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic. In that context, on 28 June 2023, the OPCW Technical Secretariat issued a report of the FFM regarding incidents of alleged use of toxic chemicals as a weapon in Kharbit Masasnah on 7 July and 4 August 2017. The report concluded that the information obtained and analysed in line with the FFM's mandate did not provide reasonable grounds for the FFM to determine that toxic chemicals were used as a weapon in the reported incidents. I understand that

the FFM is currently preparing upcoming deployments and will report to the OPCW Executive Council on the results of its work in due course.

The Investigation and Identification Team also continues its investigations into incidents in which the FFM determined that chemical weapons were used or likely used in the Syrian Arab Republic and will issue further reports in due course.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate a call made on numerous occasions by the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs — the use of chemical weapons anywhere, by anyone, under any circumstances, is a grave violation of international law. There can be no justification for their use. We must make every effort to ensure the continued resilience of the taboo against these horrific weapons. Those responsible for such attacks must be identified and held accountable, for the sake of the victims and as a deterrent to future chemical warfare. The United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs stands ready to provide whatever support and assistance it can.

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

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

Mr. DeLaurentis (United States of America): I thank Mr. Ebo for his briefing this morning and for the continuing efforts of the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) on this important issue.

As we meet again to discuss serious, numerous brazen violations of the Chemical Weapons Convention and Security Council resolutions, we are reminded of the many lives the Al-Assad regime has taken through its chemical-weapons attacks, which have been well documented in the OPCW's reports, and we are reminded of the sheer length of time we have worked to address this issue and seek accountability.

We are approaching the 10-year mark since Syria acceded to the Chemical Weapons Convention, yet Syria continues to hide details of its chemical-weapons programme. It blatantly disregards its obligations under resolution 2118 (2013) and remains in violation of the Convention. The United States condemns in the strongest terms the Syrian regime's repeated use of these horrific weapons, as documented, most recently,

in the OPCW's 27 January 2023 report, which attributed the use of chemical weapons to the Al-Assad regime during the 7 April 2018 attack on Douma.

Syria may wish to delay and obstruct efforts to address its non-compliance and avoid accountability in hopes that it can do so long enough that the international community will lose interest. But we are committed to working with our partners to make sure this does not happen. We were successful in this effort at the recently concluded fifth Review Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention, in The Hague. While the Al-Assad regime and its enablers sought to ignore or undermine the legitimacy of the OPCW's efforts on Syria, including the work of its Declaration Assessment Team, Fact-Finding Mission and Investigation and Identification Team, we worked with a broad coalition of partners during the Review Conference to stand firm in refusing to accept anything that would undermine those efforts. And indeed, the critical work of the OPCW on this file will continue.

It remains quite clear, including through the proceedings of the Review Conference, that the Al-Assad regime and its enablers are on the wrong side of history and will be judged accordingly. This issue will continue to demand our attention at the OPCW and in the Security Council until Syria fully declares its chemical-weapons programme and completely and verifiably destroys its stockpiles and production facilities and until there is accountability for the use of chemical weapons in Syria and justice for the victims of those attacks. Anything less than serious full compliance is a threat to the global norm against chemical-weapons use and against the very purpose of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

We support the work of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic and the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011, and other entities collecting information and evidence that may assist investigations and prosecutions of members of the Al-Assad regime and of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham who were responsible for chemical-weapons attacks in Syria. We also support the efforts of third countries exercising jurisdiction over international crimes committed by former Al-Assad regime officials and Da'esh members. The United States will continue

to demand accountability for chemical-weapons attacks and are even now pursuing investigations and prosecutions of crimes involving chemical weapons. We ask the Members of the Council to join us in such efforts. The stakes are far too dire for us to do less.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We regret that today the members of the Security Council must once again waste their time discussing the Syrian chemical dossier, although there have been no new developments over the past two months requiring the attention of the Security Council. Damascus, despite all the difficulties, continues to cooperate with the Technical Secretariat of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). Recent reports by the Director-General confirm that fact, but otherwise they are no different from the formulaic and biased documents signed by Mr. Arias.

We have stated many times that it would suffice to discuss this topic in the Council once per quarter. That would allow us to assess the situation on the ground and progress in the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013). However, as we can see from the repeated statements made at every meeting by Western States, they have long forgotten about the purpose of this resolution and ignore all the actions taken by Damascus. After all, their only goal is to use every opportunity to try to discredit the Syrian authorities in the Security Council. We have consistently rejected such an approach, which does palpable damage to the authority of the Security Council.

It is obvious that the reputation of the international Organization is of little concern to the United States and its allies. A clear example of that is the current worrisome situation with the OPCW, whose Technical Secretariat, under the influence of Western countries, more or less openly states that it is promoting Western interests. That is reflected in the recent report of the Fact-Finding Mission, on incidents in Kharbit Masasnah on 4 July and 7 August 2017, which was prepared upon Syria's request.

I would note that the related documentation was circulated in the Security Council only yesterday, in flagrant violation of the timelines for Council members to study such voluminous documents, consult with their capitals and establish their position. According to the report, the experts were allegedly unable to reach a conclusion on the use of toxic chemicals against the

Syrian armed forces, citing a lack of evidence. Of course, if the Technical Secretariat's activities had adhered strictly to the provisions of the Convention and the fundamental principles of the conduct of an investigation, particularly the collection and chain of custody of evidence, no questions would have been raised. However, the Technical Secretariat's reputation had already been disastrously undermined by its unscrupulous violations of those principles during the analysis of other incidents, when experts did not hesitate to use open-source data or information obtained after the fact from third parties, including some known to be biased.

That did not prevent the OPCW experts from drawing conclusions about Damascus's culpability. And when the available information ran counter to the goal of vilifying the Syrian authorities, they would go as far as to literally edit the prepared documents, as in the case of the infamous report of the Fact-Finding Mission on the staged incident in Douma in 2018. Even the OPCW's own experts talked about such an egregious violation of its principles. But instead of putting things right in its subsidiary body and restoring the reputation of the Technical Secretariat, the leadership, shielded by Western countries, has gone even further. It is now openly defending the method of substantiating various conclusions not with facts but based on so-called "reasons to believe". In practice, the technical experts have already admitted that their basis is an established political position into which they fit whatever information they get, independently of its plausibility. The inevitable inconsistencies that arise are simply ignored. When the Western countries need to blame the Syrian armed forces, the Technical Secretariat boldly draws the appropriate conclusions. In the remaining cases, the experts "throw up their hands" and refuse to acknowledge the facts about terrorists and militants' use of chemical weapons, claiming a so-called lack of evidence.

Today the Western delegations in the Security Council will say whatever it takes, true or not, to "defend the honour" of the OPCW leadership, while portraying our entirely justified concerns about its activities as mere "Russian propaganda". At the same time, they will deliberately overlook the fact that OPCW Director-General Arias himself spoke about the above-mentioned method of analysis — if it can even be considered a method — in this Chamber in February (see S/PV.9255). We recall that, at the time, Mr. Arias

was trying to somehow justify the conclusions that the illegitimate Investigation and Identification Team had come to about the incident in Douma. It is a pity that today the Council members will once again be unable to ask him questions, of which we have many, about the work of the entity he heads, which makes this discussion all the more meaningless.

It is also futile to expect Western delegations to acknowledge the consequences of their short-sighted policies on the OPCW. The desire to transform the Technical Secretariat from an impartial and authoritative body into a mere convenient tool for putting pressure on States that Washington finds undesirable has already led to its decline. The same Investigation and Identification Team was established in flagrant disregard for the practice of decision-making by consensus and was endowed with certain attributive functions in violation of the provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) itself, and we emphasize once again that no product of the Team can be considered legitimate. That tame entity's conclusions have already been used to justify the punitive decision by the OPCW Conference of States Parties to suspend the rights of Syria, a sovereign State that has conscientiously complied with the Convention. In other words, if Washington and the other Western capitals so decide, any party to the CWC can be punished.

Moreover, in the current anti-Syrian frenzy, genuinely important and burning issues, such as the possibility of chemical weapons falling into the hands of terrorists, are deliberately ignored because they undermine the presumption of Damascus's guilt. As a result, instead of issues concerning the cooperation between the United Nations and the OPCW being discussed in the General Assembly or the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013) being discussed in the Security Council, all we hear are the same old unsubstantiated accusations of Damascus. Moreover, the Western countries have not limited themselves to Syria. We would not be surprised if today, for example, the United Kingdom presidency, as it has done at previous meetings on the Syrian chemical dossier, continued its disinformation campaign and once again for no good reason brought up its claims about Russia's alleged use of chemical weapons. As always, we will not respond to such fabrications.

In conclusion, I want to emphasize once again that the reckless policies of the countries of the collective West, based on their hatred for the legitimate

Syrian Government, will have extremely negative consequences for international security by undermining the efforts of Member States in the work of ensuring the non-proliferation and destruction of chemical weapons. Our Western colleagues bear full responsibility for that, regardless of their attempts to prove otherwise.

Mr. Afonso (Mozambique) (*spoke in French*): I have the honour to make this statement on behalf of the three African members of the Security Council (A3), Gabon, Ghana and my own country, Mozambique. We thank Mr. Adedeji Ebo, Deputy to the High Representative of the United Nations Office of Disarmament Affairs, for the information he provided us with. We also welcome the representatives of the Syrian Arab Republic, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Türkiye to this meeting.

(*spoke in English*)

The A3 thanks the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) for its 117th monthly report (see S/2023/484), covering the period from 24 May to 23 June. We would like to express our support for its work. In that regard, we welcome the conduct of limited in-country activities by a small group of members of the Declaration Assessment Team, as part of the continued efforts of the OPCW Technical Secretariat to carry out its mandate in line with resolution 2118 (2013), and we look forward to the outcome of that mission. We take note of the Syrian National Authority's submission of its 115th monthly report concerning activities on its territory related to the destruction of its chemical weapons, as well as its chemical-weapon production facilities, as required by the OPCW Executive Council.

We welcome the recent steps taken by the Syrian Government in line with its obligations under resolution 2118 (2013). The Government's response in April to the results of the analysis of samples collected by the Declaration Assessment Team in April 2019 is a step in the right direction. Furthermore, the agreement between the Syrian Government and the Technical Secretariat to hold a meeting in Beirut to discuss all matters pertinent to the country's chemical-weapons programme is to be commended. The A3 is hopeful that the meeting will serve as a prelude to a direct high-level exchange between Syria's Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates and the OPCW Director-General. It is the belief of Gabon, Ghana and Mozambique that a meeting between the two dignitaries would be helpful

in building confidence and providing the impetus needed to advance the programme's various aspects and encourage further cooperation.

The recent steps taken by the Syrian Government, if continued and extended to cover other pending issues, will bring us closer to a resolution of the matter. However, we remain concerned about the lack of substantive progress. Going forward, we hope to see productive cooperation between the OPCW Technical Secretariat and the Syrian National Authority in dealing satisfactorily with all outstanding issues.

The international community at large and the Security Council in particular must continue to be concerned about the potential re-emergence and increasing threats of chemical warfare and take urgent steps to accelerate actions towards a world free of chemical weapons. The A3 collectively stands against the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere and under any circumstance. We remain strongly committed to the established norms against the use of chemical weapons and all efforts to save humankind from the scourge of such weapons, including their production, storage or use. In this regard, we reaffirm our strong support for resolution 2118 (2013).

We urge the support of the Council in addressing more constructively those issues that constrain meaningful progress in the full implementation of resolution 2118 (2013). The early closure and elimination of Syria's chemical weapons programme forms an important part of our common goal in search of international peace and security.

Finally, the A3 encourages continuous, constructive dialogue and cooperation between both parties on all outstanding issues. We wish to emphasize that the destruction of all categories of chemical weapons under strict international verification remains one of the major objectives of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction.

Mr. Hamamoto (Japan): First, I would like to thank the Deputy to the High Representative, Mr. Ebo, for his briefing.

In May, the fifth Review Conference of the Chemical Weapons Convention provided an invaluable opportunity to address a wide range of topics related to chemical weapons. It is regrettable that despite the

dedicated efforts and intensive negotiations among the States parties, we were unable to reach a consensus on an outcome document for the Conference.

Nevertheless, during the Review Conference, 57 States parties united in a joint statement to reaffirm their strong condemnation against the use, and the threat of use, of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere, at any time and under any circumstance, including by the Syrian Arab Air Force, as the Investigation and Identification Team concluded in its report.

The use of chemical weapons by Syria remains a threat to international peace and security. We must express deep concerns with regard to the continuing discrepancies, gaps and inconsistencies in Syria's initial and subsequent declarations, as once again confirmed by the latest monthly report from the Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) (see S/2023/484). Japan urges Syria to engage in good faith with the OPCW Technical Secretariat and provide all requested documents to solve the outstanding issues related to the initial and subsequent declarations submitted by Syria.

We welcome the continued efforts undertaken by the OPCW and its Technical Secretariat to address all outstanding issues, including the second round of limited in-country activities conducted by the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT). However, a reduced team without any technical consultations with the Syrian National Authority can never be considered sufficient. We urge the Syrian Government to fully comply with its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention and resolution 2118 (2013) by granting full and unhindered access to DAT staff to verify compliance.

We also deplore the lack of progress in organizing a high-level meeting between the Director-General of the OPCW and the Syrian Minister for Foreign Affairs, as well as the next round of consultations between the DAT and the Syrian National Authority.

The Security Council cannot remain silent and allow impunity for those responsible for the use of chemical weapons against their own people. Japan reiterates its strong support for the OPCW and its Technical Secretariat in their efforts to hold the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons accountable and to ensure the complete elimination of chemical weapons in Syria.

Mr. Montalvo Sosa (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the Deputy to the High Representative of the Office for Disarmament Affairs, Mr. Adedeji Ebo, for his briefing. We also welcome the presence of the representatives of Syria, Iran and Türkiye at today's meeting.

We appreciate the efforts of the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, as well as those of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), aimed at providing detailed and independent information on the status of the complete and verifiable elimination of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic. The OPCW report submitted to the Security Council in accordance with paragraph 12 of resolution 2118 of 2013 (see S/2023/484) outlines once again the lack of significant progress in the matter due to the limitations imposed despite the efforts made by the technical teams. This is why we urge the Syrian Arab Republic to comply with the OPCW's requirements, promptly submit the required information to clarify all the gaps identified in its declarations and allow unrestricted access to all sites and locations under investigation to the staff of the OPCW technical teams.

My delegation wishes to take this opportunity to reaffirm the content of the joint statement on the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic delivered by the representative of Ecuador on behalf of 57 countries in the framework of the fifth Review Conference of the States Parties to Chemical Weapons Convention, which took place from 15 to 19 May 2023, in The Hague, Kingdom of the Netherlands. This statement was joined by eight members of the Security Council, namely, Albania, France, Japan, Malta, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States, as well as my country, Ecuador.

In closing, I affirm Ecuador's support for the work of the OPCW and reiterate, as several delegations have done, that no use of chemical weapons by any actor, anywhere, at any time and under any circumstances can or should go unpunished.

Mr. Ciscaldi (Malta): I thank Mr. Ebo for his briefing.

Independent investigations by the United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) have demonstrated that Syria has used weapons of mass destruction against its population nine times. After the adoption of resolution 2118 (2013) 10 years ago, Syria has yet to disclose all

the necessary information regarding its stockpiles, which have not been completely eliminated. The lack of progress on the matter is extremely concerning, and Syria bears complete responsibility for that situation. Syria must comply with its mandated responsibility by granting access to OPCW personnel for deployment in the country.

The recent limited deployment of OPCW teams observed last month is not a satisfactory substitute. Syria must cease obstructing the efforts of the Technical Secretariat and adhere to its international obligations. Malta expresses its support for the independent, unbiased and expert work carried out by the OPCW and its Technical Secretariat. The crucial role in the worldwide eradication of chemical weapons and in guaranteeing the complete elimination of such weapons in Syria is highly valued. Any baseless assertions intended to undermine the credibility of the OPCW or cast doubts on its findings must be appropriately addressed and rebutted by the members of the Council.

In 2013, the Council reached a unanimous decision that those responsible for the use of chemical weapons should be held accountable. The use of chemical weapons cannot and must not go unpunished. The only means to ensure global confidence in the complete and verifiable elimination of Syria's chemical weapons programme is through Syria's substantive cooperation with the OPCW. It must provide the necessary assurances regarding its chemical weapons programme, in line with the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Malta believes that the Security Council should focus its efforts and resources on achieving significant advancements in the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013). As members of the Council, we have the duty to send the message that the use of chemical weapons is intolerable, and that those who fail to fulfil their obligations will be held responsible for their actions.

To conclude, Malta reiterates its full support to the OPCW Technical Secretariat and its technical teams that carry out their mandate independently and impartially and in accordance with the highest international standards. Malta reaffirms its strong condemnation of the use of chemical weapons by any actor, under any circumstances.

Mr. Stastoli (Albania): Let me begin by thanking Mr. Ebo for his briefing.

We condemn in the strongest terms the repeated use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime and the refusal to cooperate with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and support all efforts to hold the perpetrators to account. We deplore the Al-Assad regime's persistent refusal to comply with the Chemical Weapons Convention and resolution 2118 (2013), as well as its lack of goodwill and its bad faith, as the 116th and 117th periodic reports of the OPCW reveal. We condemn the refusal of the Al-Assad regime to respond to 20 outstanding questions concerning its faulty declarations since 2019. We reiterate our condemnation of the refusal to issue a visa to the senior technical expert of the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) since April 2021. The Syrian regime behaves in an aberrant manner that should be met with the scorn of the world and, above all, firm action from the Council.

Against the backdrop of persistent non-cooperation from the Syrian regime, we take note of the deployment of a reduced DAT team in January and the arrival of samples at the OPCW laboratories in June 2023 for analysis. We eagerly await the results. Likewise, we await with equal interest the inspections of the Barzah and Jamrayah facilities.

We commend the work of the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission (FFM), which determined the use of chemicals as weapons in Syria. The objective, rigorous and impartial establishment of the facts is indispensable to all of us. We welcome the most recent report of the FFM, which dismisses the baseless allegations made by the Syrian regime about the alleged use of chemical weapons against the Syrian Arab Army on 7 July and 4 August 2017.

We welcome the work of the Investigation and Identification Team and its reports, which identify the perpetrators of the use of chemicals as weapons in Syria. We fully endorse the findings of its third report, stating that the Al-Assad regime is responsible for the deadly chemical weapons attack on Douma on 7 April 2018.

We reiterate our call for robust international action to ensure the Syrian regime fully declares and destroys its chemical weapons stockpiles and chemical weapons programme in a transparent and verifiable manner. The Security Council needs to impress upon the Al-Assad regime that there is no alternative to full cooperation and implementation of resolution 2118 (2013). We

reiterate our full support for the objective, impartial and professional work of the OPCW and condemn actions that seek to damage its reputation.

We remain steadfast in our condemnation of the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere, at any time and under any circumstances and the imperative of ending impunity for those who have used them.

Mr. Olmedo (France) (*spoke in French*): I, too, thank Mr. Ebo for his briefing.

As we all know, we are here because the Syrian regime has used weapons of mass destruction against its own population. Independent investigations by the United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) have demonstrated that nine times.

In January, the OPCW published a damning report showing how the Syrian air force deliberately dropped two barrels of chlorine on residential buildings, killing 43 people. France condemns in the strongest terms the repeated use of such horrific weapons. Nevertheless, almost a decade after the adoption of resolution 2118 (2013), the regime has still not shed any light on its stockpiles. We know, however, that not all of them have been destroyed.

It is therefore imperative that the Syrian regime allow OPCW personnel to deploy in Syria, as per its mandate. Limited deployment of OPCW teams is not a viable alternative. Syria must stop obstructing the work of the Technical Secretariat and comply with its international obligations if it wants to regain its rights and privileges.

Despite the obstacles it faces, I would like to commend the independent, impartial and professional work of the OPCW. We laud the work of the Fact-Finding Mission and the recent publication of its most recent report on the two incidents at Kharbit Masasnah in July and August 2017, which confirmed that there was no evidence that chemical weapons had been used, contrary to Syria's claims.

No disinformation campaign can hide the regime's guilt. Exposing the truth is essential in order to hold the perpetrators of those attacks responsible. There must be no impunity for war criminals. The fight against impunity is the foundation of the effectiveness and credibility of the prohibition regime. France will continue to uphold those principles with its partners.

Mr. Sun Zhiqiang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China thanks the Deputy to the High Representative of the United Nations Office of Disarmament Affairs for his briefing.

With regard to the issue of chemical weapons, China's position has been consistent. China firmly opposes the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere, under any circumstances and for any purpose, and hopes that our world will be free of all chemical weapons at an early date. Dialogue and consultation are the only way to resolve the issue of chemical weapons in Syria. We welcome the high-level meeting between the Syrian Government and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in Beirut and look forward to the holding of a high-level meeting between the Syrian Foreign Minister, the head of the Syrian National Authority and the OPCW Director-General as soon as possible.

Concerning the different interpretations of a number of issues by the Government of Syria and the Technical Secretariat, we are in favour of respecting the scientific facts, adhering to objectivity and fairness and ensuring that the two sides continue to discuss the matter fully and improve their convergence with a view to jointly resolving the outstanding issues as soon as possible. At the same time, China calls on the international community to view Syria's efforts objectively. We hope that the Secretariat will also respond to Syria's concerns and demands in a professional and transparent manner. The Secretariat should pay full attention to the information previously provided by the Government of Syria on the possession and use of chemical weapons by terrorist organizations.

Finally, China reiterates that the Council should reduce the frequency of its deliberations on the Syrian chemical-weapons issue, which would help it save resources and improve its efficiency.

Mr. Wazima Szatmari (Brazil): I thank Mr. Adedeji Ebo, the Deputy to the High Representative of the United Nations Office of Disarmament Affairs, for his briefing and welcome the participation in today's meeting of the representatives of the Syrian Arab Republic, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Türkiye.

We have carefully read the report dated 23 June by the Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) (S/2023/484) and have once again found little new information that would merit the Security Council's attention. We

continue to follow the results of the limited in-country activities by members of the Declaration Assessment Team. We welcome the fact that the OPCW Technical Secretariat and the Syrian National Authority have agreed on holding a meeting to discuss matters related to the Syrian chemical file. We hope those renewed contacts will lead to further cooperation between the OPCW and Syria to address all the outstanding issues related to its initial declaration and the violations of the Chemical Weapons Convention in the conflict in Syria.

We reiterate that the work of the OPCW in establishing the factual truth regarding those incidents must be carried out with an unequivocal commitment to transparency, impartiality and technical rigour. Only that can provide a basis for the attribution of responsibility by the Security Council as the competent body to deliver on that task. With that in mind, we understand that all instances of investigation and fact-finding deployed by the OPCW should be impervious to any suspicion of political interference.

Brazil received with deep concern the most recent report circulated by the Berlin Group 21 in The Hague on the process that led to the publication of the final report of the mission deployed to investigate the alleged use of chemical weapons in Douma in April 2018. The document raises a host of extremely concerning issues that the OPCW should not ignore if it is to preserve the credibility of its conclusions, regarding not only the Douma incident but all aspects of non-verification missions. We expect the OPCW Director-General and the Secretariat to address the issues raised in the Berlin Group review in a transparent manner, preferably by the next session of the OPCW Executive Council. At the very least, the OPCW should strengthen its internal practices to stave off any suspicion of a lack of technical rigour and to ensure freedom from political interference in its verification activities.

In conclusion, I reiterate that Brazil strongly condemns the use of chemical weapons, anywhere, by anyone, under any circumstances. Any use of such weapons represents a serious threat to international peace and security. Closer cooperation both between Syria and the OPCW and between the OPCW and the United Nations remains our best hope for closing the so-called Syrian chemical file and for preventing and deterring any future use of such weapons.

Mrs. Chanda (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I would first like to thank Mr. Ebo, the Deputy to the

High Representative of the United Nations Office of Disarmament Affairs, for his briefing.

Switzerland considers the Chemical Weapons Convention to be an important pillar of our collective security. Ratified by nearly every State, including Syria in 2013, the Convention offers protection against the threats and devastating effects of chemical weapons. Switzerland was very pleased to learn of the announcement by the Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) that the last stockpiles of officially declared chemical weapons had been completely destroyed. That is a historic step for multilateralism and disarmament efforts.

On the other hand, we regret that the OPCW Member States were unable to reach a consensus on an outcome document for the fifth Review Conference of the Convention in The Hague from 15 to 19 May. However, the Conference showed that there is consensus on many issues and that the vast majority of delegations believe that the issue of chemical weapons in Syria remains a central challenge to the Convention's full implementation. In that connection, I want to once again reaffirm my country's full confidence in the OPCW as the principal custodian of the Convention. There is no doubt about the integrity and professionalism of the OPCW and all its missions, including those of the Investigation and Identification Team. We therefore look forward to receiving the report following the visit to Syria from 12 to 19 April by a small team from the Declaration Assessment Team, as well as the results of the analysis of samples currently under way in OPCW-designated laboratories.

We welcome the meeting that took place between the OPCW and Syria on 22 and 23 June in Beirut. We also note the ongoing exchanges between the OPCW and Syria with a view to a possible resumption of consultations between the Declaration Assessment Team and the Syrian National Authority, and we hope those efforts will be successful in the very near future. The obstacles posed by Syria to the restoration of full cooperation with the OPCW represent a serious breach of the obligations contained in resolution 2118 (2013). Syria should provide immediate and unimpeded access to OPCW personnel and respond to the 20 outstanding issues identified by the OPCW Technical Secretariat.

The reports of the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team have concluded that there have been repeated instances of the use of chemical weapons in Syria, causing numerous casualties, including among children. The use of such weapons is prohibited in all

circumstances, and in armed conflicts can constitute a war crime. It is essential that those crimes do not go unpunished and that the people responsible are identified, prosecuted and punished. In that regard, we welcome the formal cooperation between the OPCW and the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011. It is an important step towards implementing resolution 2118 (2013), as well as ensuring compliance with relevant international law.

Mr. Bastaki (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Adedeji Ebo for his briefing.

I would also like to reiterate the firm position of the United Arab Emirates whereby we reject and explicitly condemn the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere and under any circumstances. Their use constitutes a flagrant violation of the provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention and international law. In the context of today's topic, I would like to note two issues.

First, a meaningful dialogue between the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and Syria remains essential if we want to achieve tangible progress on this file. We reiterate the need to work in accordance with the principles that the OPCW, with its technical nature, was founded on, foremost of which are consensus and non-politicization. In that regard, we note the Fact-Finding Mission's recently issued report on the Kharbit Masasnah incident.

Secondly, the threat of chemical terrorism remains an important challenge that requires considerable attention, especially as Da'esh continues to carry out terrorist attacks without hesitating to use any available means or weapons to restore its control in Syria. It is a serious threat to the security and stability not just of Syria but the entire region.

In conclusion, the United Arab Emirates stresses once again the importance of making progress on the Syria chemical weapons file, as well as across all files related to resolving the Syrian crisis.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the United Kingdom.

I start by joining others in thanking Mr. Ebo for his briefing.

Ten years after Syria's accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention, resolution 2118 (2013) and 117 monthly reports by the Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, it remains impossible to verify the complete destruction of Syria's chemical weapons programme. That is not due to lack of effort on behalf of the Technical Secretariat, whose efforts and perseverance we commend — it is entirely the responsibility of the Syrian authorities.

Syria has consistently denied retaining any chemical weapons stockpiles, despite clear evidence to the contrary. The whereabouts of several hundred tons of chemical warfare agent remain unclear, and their destruction still cannot be verified. Until States parties and the Technical Secretariat are satisfied that Syria is making meaningful progress in addressing the 20 outstanding issues with its declaration, we all need to continue to put pressure on Syria to abide by all its obligations. That includes the requirement for Syria to cooperate fully with the Technical Secretariat in good faith.

We should hold Syria accountable for its actions. All States should urge Syria to abide by its obligations under the Convention. Until outstanding issues are resolved, we cannot rule out Syria retaining some sort of chemical weapons programme. Given its repeated flagrant use of chemical weapons, we cannot exclude the possibility that the Al-Assad regime will use chemical weapons again.

We should not let this go. Syria's chemical weapons programme remains a threat to international peace and security. It matters to all of us.

I resume my functions as President of the Council.

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 reiterate the Syrian Arab Republic's condemnation of the use of chemical weapons at anytime, anywhere, by whomever and under any circumstances. I would also like to reiterate our total rejection of the false accusations and desperate lies launched by certain countries against my own.

Despite my country's many reservations concerning the working methods of the Technical Secretariat of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), the Syrian Arab Republic

continues to cooperate with the organization, guided by its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and in line with its strategic decision taken in 2013 to join the CWC and destroy its entire stockpile and production facilities. In that context, I would like to highlight the most recent developments related to cooperation between the Syrian National Authority and the OPCW Technical Secretariat.

First, the Syrian National Authority submitted its 114th and 115th monthly reports for May and June respectively regarding the activities it conducted on Syrian territory.

Second, the Syrian National Authority facilitated two visits by a reduced Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) to Damascus this year, during which the Syrian National Authority demonstrated the highest level of cooperation by providing access to certain sites, facilitating the collection of samples and doing interviews with witnesses. In that context, we stress the importance of holding the twenty-fifth round of consultations with the DAT and working to expedite the closure of outstanding issues, rather than insisting on procedural matters for which there are many alternatives.

Third, upon the suggestion of the Syrian National Authority, a separate higher-level meeting was held with the DAT in Beirut at the end of last month. During that meeting, the Syrian National Authority stressed the need to understand the specificities of the Syrian dossier, as well as the difficult circumstances surrounding it and the importance of working to resolve all outstanding issues, rather than raising issues that compromise national sovereignty. It was also stressed that meetings should continue to be held between the two sides, as the exchange of correspondence currently falls short of meeting the required purpose. The Syrian National Authority underscored the need for the two parties to find common ground and reach an understanding to ensure progress towards closing the file as soon as possible. The Syrian National Authority has also taken note of the concerns raised by the delegation of the Technical Secretariat and is currently considering ways to address those concerns.

Fourth, the Syrian National Authority recently provided explanations for the results of the analysis of samples collected by the DAT in April 2019.

Fifth, the Syrian National Authority agreed to extend the tripartite agreement among the Syrian Arab Republic, the Technical Secretariat of the OPCW and the United Nations Office for Project Services for a period

of six months, until 31 December this year, in order to facilitate the tasks and activities carried out by the OPCW in Syria.

Sixth, the Syrian Arab Republic reiterates the importance of holding a high-level meeting between the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, the Chairman of the Syrian National Authority and the Director-General of the OPCW as soon as possible. We also call for the continuation of ongoing contacts between the two focal points on the agenda of that meeting.

Seventh, the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) recently issued its report on the two incidents that took place on 7 July and 4 August 2017, which were reported by my country. Sites of the Syrian Arab Army were targeted in the Kharbit Masasnah area in Hama governorate with poison gas mortars. For the past five years, my country has repeatedly requested that the FFM issue its reports on those two incidents, along with a number of other incidents, especially after my country provided the FFM with all the necessary evidence and assistance to obtain witness testimonies and access hospital records. We also provided the FFM with the necessary clarifications and information from their sources.

However, my delegation regrets that the erroneous working methods and the serious defects in the work of the FFM — including its violation of the terms of reference for its work and its departure from the substance and provisions of the CWC, especially its verification annex — have once again led the Mission to unprofessional conclusions that reflect further evidence of the double standards that the FFM applies in its work.

In its investigations of other incidents, the FFM has always relied on different methods of work, whereby it depends on open or anonymous sources and has used evidence gathered by terrorist groups. Moreover, the FFM always drafts its conclusions in an indecisive manner, thereby deepening mistrust in the work of that team and proves its low level of professionalism and objectivity.

In conclusion, it is regrettable that the cooperation of the Syrian National Authority with the Technical Secretariat of the OPCW is met with ingratitude and denial, whether by minimizing aspects of our cooperation or exaggerating certain procedural measures, not to mention by focusing on negative rather than positive aspects in the monthly reports issued by

the Technical Secretariat. My delegation stresses the need for a comprehensive review of the erroneous working methods of the OPCW Technical Secretariat and its teams, as well as the need to ensure that the Technical Secretariat does not become a political tool to serve the hostile agendas of certain countries against others.

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

Mr. Irvani (Islamic Republic of Iran): We welcome the presence of Mr. Ebo, Deputy to the High Representative of the United Nations Office of Disarmament Affairs, at today's briefing.

Iran once again condemns the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere and under any circumstances. The use of such lethal weapons is a flagrant violation of international law, constitutes a crime against humanity and poses a serious threat to international peace and security.

Iran has tragically been one of the primary victims of chemical weapons. On 28 June 1987, the city of Sardasht in Iran endured a devastating chemical weapon attack, leading to the immense suffering and loss of innocent civilians, including women and children.

Western countries, including France, the United Kingdom and the United States, bear a responsibility for supporting and collaborating with the Saddam Hussein regime during Iraq's war against Iran. Their complicity enabled the systematic use of chemical weapons against the Iranian people, an act that should not be forgotten. The silence or active participation of Western countries in those atrocities undermined the pursuit of justice and revealed blatant double standards. That also hindered the Security Council's ability to fulfil its responsibilities and hold perpetrators accountable for such heinous crimes.

The Syrian Arab Republic remains steadfast in its commitment to fulfilling its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention. In alignment with that commitment, the Syrian Government has maintained a constructive and cooperative approach towards the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

The report of the OPCW Technical Secretariat (see S/2023/484) confirms that all 27 declared chemical weapons production facilities in Syria have been successfully destroyed. To ensure transparency and

accountability, Syria has been regularly submitting monthly reports on the progress of chemical weapons dismantlement.

In May and June 2023, Syria submitted its 114th and 115th monthly reports to the OPCW Director-General, providing details of the activities carried out to dismantle chemical weapons and their production facilities. Moreover, Syria has facilitated two visits by a reduced team from the Declaration Assessment Team to Damascus this year. During those visits, the Syrian National Authority extended its full cooperation by allowing access to sites, collecting samples and conducting interviews with witnesses.

In line with the suggestion made by the Syrian National Authority, a separate meeting with a higher-level Declaration Assessment Team was held in Beirut at the end of the last month, demonstrating Syria's commitment to engagement and cooperation. Additionally, the Syrian National Authority has agreed to extend the tripartite agreement among the Syrian Arab Republic, the OPCW Technical Secretariat and the United Nations Office for Project Services. The extension, effective until 31 December, aims to facilitate the tasks and activities of the OPCW in Syria. Through those actions, Syria is actively demonstrating its dedication to fulfilling its obligations and cooperating with the OPCW in the pursuit of the complete eradication of chemical weapons within its territory.

We fully support promoting constructive dialogue between Syria and the OPCW at the highest level and setting a specific time frame to address any remaining issues and bring the file to a final and conclusive closure. Such an approach will ensure transparency, accountability and a satisfactory resolution to all outstanding matters related to chemical weapons in Syria. In that context, we applaud Syria's determination to convene such a high-level meeting.

The integrity and credibility of the OPCW, as an international body, hinge on its ability to remain neutral and objective, guided solely by scientific and technical considerations. That approach is essential in effectively preventing the use of chemical weapons and advancing the goals of the Convention.

Furthermore, any investigation must be impartial, professional, reliable and objective. Such investigations must fully adhere to the requirements and procedures outlined in the Convention. To effectively address unresolved issues and maintain the technical nature of

discussions, it is crucial to avoid politicizing the matter and employing double standards. By doing so, we can work towards justice, accountability and the prevention of further atrocities.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Türkiye.

Mr. Çetin (Türkiye): We thank Director Ebo for his briefing.

The latest monthly report of the Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) (see S/2023/484) demonstrates that the outstanding issues in relation to the Syrian regime's initial and subsequent declarations persist. Owing to identified gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies that remain unresolved, the OPCW Technical Secretariat still cannot consider that declaration accurate and complete. Moreover, as we have heard from Director Ebo today, the OPCW Secretariat is still waiting for responses to its inquiries sent to the regime regarding its chemical weapons production facilities and unauthorized movement of chlorine cylinders related to the 2018 Douma attack.

We note the information on the second round of limited in-country activities conducted by a reduced Declaration Assessment Team from 12 to 19 April.

The periodic report, however, shows that the reasons preventing the holding of the next round of consultations between the OPCW Declaration Assessment Team and the Syrian National Authority still persist. We call on the Syrian regime to fully cooperate with the OPCW Technical Secretariat, submit pending declarations and documents and fulfil its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention and resolution 2118 (2013).

The work of the OPCW fact-finding mission and investigations by the Investigation and Identification Team are critical if we are to establish the truth about chemical weapons use in Syria. In that respect, we take note of the recent report of the fact-finding mission regarding two incidents of alleged use of toxic chemicals as weapons in Kharbit Masasnah on 7 July and 4 August 2017.

Let me reiterate that the use of chemical weapons is a grave violation of international law and unacceptable under any circumstances. We will continue to support the efforts by the United Nations and the OPCW aimed at ensuring accountability for the repeated use of chemical weapons in Syria.

The meeting rose at 12.25 p.m.