



Security Council

Seventy-sixth year

8785th meeting

Thursday, 3 June 2021, 10.25 a.m.

New York

Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Jürgenson/Mr. Auväärt	(Estonia)
<i>Members:</i>	China	Mr. Geng Shuang
	France	Mr. De Rivièrè
	India	Mr. Tirumurti
	Ireland	Ms. Byrne Nason
	Kenya	Mr. Kiboino
	Mexico	Mr. De la Fuente Ramírez
	Niger	Mr. Aougi
	Norway	Ms. Heimerback
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	Ms. Prince
	Tunisia	Mr. Ladeb
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Dame Barbara Woodward
	United States of America	Mr. Mills
	Viet Nam	Mr. Pham

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Letter dated 27 May 2021 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2021/514)

* Reissued for technical reasons on 10 June 2021.

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The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Letter dated 27 May 2021 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2021/514)

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 Turkey to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mrs. Izumi Nakamitsu, United Nations High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, and Mr. Fernando Arias, Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

Director-General Arias is joining today's meeting via video-teleconference from The Hague.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of the Council members to document S/2021/514, which contains the text of a letter dated 27 May 2021 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council.

I now give the floor to Mrs. Nakamitsu.

Mrs. Nakamitsu: I thank you, Sir, for this opportunity to brief the Security Council once again on the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013), on the elimination of the chemical weapons programme of the Syrian Arab Republic. It is so nice to be able to brief members back in the Chamber.

It is also a pleasure to be joined here today virtually by the Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), Mr. Fernando Arias, who will update the Council on the elimination of the Syrian Arab Republic chemical weapons programme.

Since the previous Security Council meeting on resolution 2118 (2013), held on 6 May 2021 (see S/2021/446), the Office for Disarmament Affairs has

been in regular contact with counterparts at the OPCW on activities related to this matter. Per established practice, I held a monthly call with the OPCE Director-General on 1 June 2021 to receive an update and ascertain his views. In the light of the participation of Director-General Arias in this meeting today, my statement will be brief.

At the outset, I want to take this opportunity to reiterate my appreciation to Director-General Arias and the staff of the OPCW Technical Secretariat for the professional and impartial efforts to uphold the norm against the use of chemical weapons and for our partnership in the pursuit of the elimination of these inhumane weapons.

The OPCW Technical Secretariat's ability to deploy to the Syrian Arab Republic remained subject to the evolution of the coronavirus disease pandemic. However, despite continued restrictions, the Technical Secretariat has been able to pursue its mandated activities related to the elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme and its engagement with the Syrian Arab Republic in that regard.

I welcome efforts to clarify all the outstanding issues regarding the initial declaration by the Syrian Arab Republic to the OPCW. Engagement and dialogue by the Syrian Arab Republic with the OPCW Technical Secretariat are essential to close the outstanding issues. As has been stressed on multiple occasions, due to the identified gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies that remain unresolved, the OPCW Technical Secretariat continues to assess that, at this stage, the declaration submitted by the Syrian Arab Republic cannot be considered accurate and complete in accordance with the Chemical Weapons Convention. I have no doubt that Director-General Arias will provide the Security Council members with an update on the efforts to ensure the timely resolution of those outstanding issues.

I have been advised that the OPCW Technical Secretariat intended to deploy the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) to Syria last month and was rescheduling the next round of consultations with the Syrian National Authority in the absence of confirmation from the Syrian Arab Republic with sufficient time to finalize the necessary preparations. I look forward to Director-General Arias's update on this matter.

I note that the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) remains in the process of studying all available

information related to allegations of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic and continues its engagement with the Syrian Government and other States parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention with regard to “a variety of incidents”. As previously reported, further FFM deployments will be subject to the evolution of the coronavirus disease pandemic.

I also understand that following the issuance of its second report, in April, the Investigation and Identification Team is continuing its investigations into incidents in which the FFM has determined that chemical weapons were used or likely used in the Syrian Arab Republic and will issue further reports in due course.

As I previously informed the Council, on 21 April 2021 the Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention, at its twenty-fifth session, adopted decision C-25/Dec.9, entitled “Addressing the Possession and Use of Chemical Weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic”, suspending the Rights and privileges of the Syrian Arab Republic under the Convention. A copy of that decision was shared with the Security Council and General Assembly members as document A/75/871- S/2021/425, pursuant to paragraph 12 of the aforementioned decision of the Conference of the States Parties. I look forward to Director-General Arias’s update on the next steps for the implementation of that decision.

There is an urgent need not only to identify but hold accountable all those who have used chemical weapons in violation of international law. It is an obligation on all of us. Without such an action, we are allowing the use of chemical weapons to take place with impunity. Unity in the Security Council is required to re-establish the norm against chemical weapons. The Office for Disarmament Affairs stands ready to provide whatever support and assistance it can in the hope that those dreadful weapons can be truly relegated to the past.

The President: I thank Mrs. Nakamitsu for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Arias.

Mr. Arias: It is a great pleasure to see all present gathered here once again in person, protected and in good health. Here in the Netherlands we are still in the process of getting vaccinated, and we help to once again be fully operationally engaged in person very soon.

I thank the Estonian presidency of the Security Council for giving me this opportunity to inform the Council about developments at the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) since my most recent appearance in the Council, on 11 December 2020 (see S/2020/1202), when I engaged in a comprehensive exchange with members at the invitation of the South African presidency.

The Syrian people have been suffering from war for more than 10 years; the Council is well aware of that. The grim reports of that suffering include, among the atrocities inflicted in that war, the use of chemical weapons. Chemical weapons have been used in the Syrian Arab Republic both before and after its accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention, in 2013. Those well-documented and repeated uses have taken place despite the successful destruction of more than 1,300 tons of declared Syrian stockpiles and stringent OPCW verification measures.

One of the deadliest attacks took place in Khan Shaykhun on 4 April 2017. It involved the use of sarin and led to several dozen casualties and more than 500 people injured. The Syrian Arab Republic acceded to the Chemical Weapons Convention in September 2013, one month after another sarin attack — this time in Ghouta and which claimed more than 1,300 lives — took place and was investigated by the United Nations mission.

Since then, the OPCW Technical Secretariat has been providing ample information to the Conference of the States Parties and the Executive Council of the OPCW as well as the Security Council through the United Nations Secretary-General, with monthly reports and my direct briefings. It is a disturbing reality that eight years down the road, the Syrian chemical weapons dossier remains far from closed. I shall now provide the council with an update on developments related to the Syrian dossier.

On 12 April, in line with its mandate to identify the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons in Syria, the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) issued its second report. In that report, the IIT, on the basis of all the information obtained and analysed, concluded that there were reasonable grounds to believe that at approximately 21:22, on 4 February 2018, during ongoing attacks against Saraqib, a military helicopter of the Syrian Arab Air Force, under the control of the Tiger Forces, hit eastern Saraqib by dropping at least one cylinder. The cylinder ruptured and released a toxic

gas, chlorine, which was dispersed over a large area, affecting 12 named individuals. That established case of chemical-weapons use by the Syrian Arab Air Force is in addition to the three other cases identified in the first IIT report, of April 2020, and presented to the Council in detail during my briefing to the Council on 12 May 2020.

Let me therefore just recall that in its first report, the IIT concluded that there were reasonable grounds to believe that the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons in Ltamenah on 24, 25 and 30 March 2017, were individuals belonging to the Syrian Arab Air Force that used sarin on two occasions and chlorine on one occasion. After the publication of those two reports, in 2020 and 2021, the IIT continued its investigation into cases of the use or likely use of chemical weapons. Currently five cases are being investigated. The IIT will report on them in due course.

On 21 April 2021, the OPCW Conference of the States Parties decided to express grave concern at the proven cases of chemical-weapons use in Syria that contravene the provisions of the Convention. It also decided to deprive Syria of the following rights and privileges: to vote in the Conference and in the Council; to stand for election to the Council; and to hold any office in the Conference, the Council or any subsidiary bodies.

Through that decision, the Director-General is to regularly report to the OPCW Executive Council on whether Syria has completed the measures that it had failed to fulfil thus far. These are, first, to declare to the Technical Secretariat the whereabouts of the facilities in which the chemical weapons used in March 2017 in three attacks in Ltamenah were developed, produced, stockpiled and operationally stored for delivery; secondly, to declare to the Technical Secretariat all of the chemical weapons it currently possesses, as well as chemical-weapon production facilities and other related facilities; and thirdly, to resolve all the outstanding issues regarding its initial declaration on its chemical weapons stockpile and programme. Once I have reported that all of those measures have been completed, Syrian rights under the Chemical Weapons Convention will be reinstated.

Over the years, the policymaking organs of both the OPCW and the Security Council have been calling for an end to impunity for chemical-weapons use and for the perpetrators to be held accountable. Resolutions

2118 (2013), 2209 (2015) and 2235 (2015) all contain those strong messages. The Secretary-General also supported that call in several of his statements by underlining that accountability is an essential part of deterrence against the use of chemical weapons.

The OPCW, including the Investigation and Identification Team, as part of the Technical Secretariat, is never a court or a tribunal; and neither was the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism, established by the Security Council in 2015 and discontinued in 2017. Through its work, however, the OPCW provides the international community with materials that will assist accountability mechanism in their tasks. As mandated by the Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Technical Secretariat has continued the transfer of information to 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, established in 2016.

It should be recalled that all the mandates given to the Convention and the decisions by the OPCW policymaking organs concerning the Syrian chemical dossier remain binding on all States parties and on the Technical Secretariat. Our work therefore continues on multiple fronts, including through engagement with Syria. The Fact-Finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic continues to establish facts surrounding allegations of the use of chemical weapons in Syria. To date, the Fact-Finding Mission has already investigated 77 allegations of chemical-weapons use and has determined 17 cases of likely or confirmed use of chemical weapons in Syria.

The report of the Fact-Finding Mission related to the incident in Douma on 7 April 2018 is still a matter of interest for some Member States, including here in the Security Council. Let me recall the facts.

The Fact-Finding Mission released its report on 1 March 2019. In it, the Mission concluded that there were reasonable grounds to believe that the use of chlorine as a weapon likely took place. Following the issuance of the report, two former inspectors of the Technical Secretariat could not accept that the conclusions of the Fact-Finding Mission were different from their own personal views that were not backed by evidence. When their positions could not gain traction

within the Technical Secretariat, they tried to publicly portray the work of the OPCW as biased and partial, and the report, somehow, doctored. By doing so, they violated all their fundamental obligations towards the OPCW and its member States.

I would like to highlight that one of the two former inspectors was never a member of the Fact-Finding Mission and had only played a supporting role for the Mission for a limited period of time. The other inspector participated in the Fact-Finding Mission investigation for the first time, but only in a limited capacity. He could not be deployed in the field, as he had not completed some of the inspector training.

Moreover, after their deployment to Douma in the summer of 2018, both of them ceased to be involved in the work of the Fact-Finding Mission and, consequently, neither had access to the critical information and analysis performed by the Mission since the end of August 2018 and for a period of more than six months preceding the conclusions of the Mission's investigation and the publication of its report on 3 March 2019.

So far, none of the 193 member States of the OPCW have challenged the findings of the Fact-Finding Mission that chlorine was found on the scene of the attack in Douma. It must be recalled that the mandate of the Fact-Finding Mission is to establish facts pertaining to the use of toxic chemicals as weapons — not to identify the perpetrators.

Since 1 March 2019, the report of the Fact-Finding Mission about Douma is under the authority of the Executive Council and the Conference of the States Parties, and it will be further examined by the Investigation and Identification Team.

Additionally, the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) continues its efforts to clarify the shortcomings found in the initial Syrian declaration. One new issue was recently opened and will be taken up during the twenty-fifth round of consultations we are preparing. It pertains to the presence of a neat chemical-weapons agent found in samples collected in large storage containers in September 2020.

On 30 April, I sent a letter to the Syrian National Authority announcing that the next round of consultations would take place between 18 May and 1 June. On 5 May, the Technical Secretariat requested the necessary and usual issuance of visas for the members of the Team. In the absence of a response, the

Technical Secretariat informed the Syrian authorities, on 14 May, of the postponement of the DAT mission to 28 May. On 26 May, still not having received any response from the Syrian authorities on the issuance of the visas, I decided to postpone the mission until further notice. The Technical Secretariat will continue to seek the next opportunity to deploy the DAT in order to support the Syrian Arab Republic in complying with all its obligations.

The biannual inspections of the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Centre continue. The Technical Secretariat also continues to prepare for inspections of the Syrian airbases identified in the JIM and IIT reports as having been involved in the use of chemical weapons. These inspections will take place as soon as both the security conditions and the evolution of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) will allow them to do so.

I wish to stress at this point that the OPCW Technical Secretariat continues to deliver on all the various Syrian-related mandates under extraordinarily difficult conditions, namely, the numerous and sophisticated cyberattacks it suffers, the massive spread of disinformation about our work and sometimes even the denigration of some staff members of the organization, and, thirdly, over the past year, the challenges imposed by the restrictions stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic.

I am constantly heartened by the determination and courage of my staff in meeting such challenging circumstances, which have been displayed in particular during the deployments that we managed to undertake notwithstanding all the obstacles and the risks.

Along with the Syrian chemical-weapons dossier, there are a few important matters related to chemical weapons that also require our attention. As I reported to Council members previously, chemical weapons have also been used in the last seven years in several countries. Many of these cases of use involved highly sophisticated chemical agents and have to be tackled with expertise and competence. The OPCW Technical Secretariat has delivered assistance upon the request of concerned States parties. It is the responsibility of the international community at large, as well as the OPCW and beyond — the wider United Nations — to take further measures.

We must also take into account that despite the OPCW's almost universal reach, there are still four States

Members of the United Nations that have not ratified or acceded to the Chemical Weapons Convention. Should any of those States join the Convention as a possessor State, another operation of elimination of chemical weapons stockpiles under OPCW verification would be set in motion.

All of these matters, together with the evolution of the global security environment and the progress of science and technology, required the Technical Secretariat's full preparedness in terms of knowledge, skills and capacity. We need to stay abreast of science and technological developments. The unique knowledge on chemical weapons that we presently possess must be preserved and retained. Our staff must be able to further develop skills and expertise so as to be able to assist the States parties in facing all kinds of chemical threats.

The Technical Secretariat will continue to actively promote chemical-security culture in all States parties to counter the threat of chemical terrorism. To this end, and despite the fact that our budget is subject to zero nominal growth, we continue to make progress on all those essential aspects of our work. An example is the new OPCW Centre for Chemistry and Technology — the ChemTech Centre — which we are building in the Netherlands, and which will be a key tool at our disposal. The building can be seen in this image of the structure's final design.

The ChemTech Centre will empower us to better address the emerging chemical-weapons threats and to contribute to the use of chemistry solely for the benefit of humankind. The Centre will function as a repository of knowledge and skills pertaining to chemical disarmament, non-proliferation, chemical security and safety, and the peaceful uses of chemistry. It will also contribute to exchange and acquisition of the expertise and skills necessary to stay at the forefront of science and technology and technological developments. It will be a global forum for chemical research and analysis, enabling Member States to establish networks of experts, researchers and laboratories through a wide range of activities. The construction of this Centre for Chemistry and Technology will start this month and, according to current plans, will be completed at the end of 2022.

In the coming two years, the organization is preparing to reach two other important milestones: first, the twenty-fifth anniversary of the organization,

in 2022, and, secondly, the end of the destruction of all declared chemical-weapons stockpiles, which is expected to be completed in 2023.

Keeping the world secure from a re-emergence of chemical weapons requires commitment and efforts by a full range of stakeholders: Governments, of course, parliaments, the chemical industry, international organizations and bodies, academia, the scientific community, and, obviously, civil society. I take it as an integral part of my duties to reach out to representatives of all those stakeholders, including United Nations partners and the members of the Security Council. We will not succeed without all of them.

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

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

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): This is the first time since last October that the Security Council has met in order to discuss resolution 2118 (2013) in person (see S/PV.8764), and we are grateful to the Estonian presidency for that. This is yet one more step towards the return of the Security Council to its traditional methods of work, which is very timely. We are also grateful to Mrs. Izumi Nakamitsu for her briefing.

We would like to also welcome the Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), Mr. Fernando Arias. It is great that the leadership of the OPCW has finally found an opportunity to participate in the meetings of the Council. We think that this format of our interaction should become a regular one.

The Syrian chemical dossier is a specific topic, and first-hand information in this context is irreplaceable. Many delegations have questions — frequently very specific questions — about OPCW activities. So far, Mrs. Nakamitsu has had to answer these questions, and we are very grateful to her for that. But exhaustive answers on this topic cannot be provided by the representative of the United Nations Secretariat, so it would be much more logical to put these questions directly to the Director-General of the OPCW and give him an opportunity to answer them in an open format. We are convinced that is in the interest of the Security Council to have maximum transparency in this regard, and we hope that this is in the interest of the OPCW

as well. We expect that this kind of open interactive exchange is exactly what we are going to have today.

In December last year, we put to Mr. Arias a number of questions having to do with the line that OPCW has taken as regards the Syrian chemical file (see S/2020/1202). Members of the Council have the list of questions, so I am not going to repeat them today, but let me just dwell on some salient points.

First of all, I would of course refer to the infamous report of the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission in Syria (FFM) on the Duma incident in April 2018 (S/1731/2019). As confirmed by various sources, including former OPCW inspectors who participated directly in the investigation, the final version was massively redacted compared to the initial draft, and this was done under pressure from some delegations. In other words, what we are dealing with in this context is fraud. The attempts by these inspectors to make sure that the leadership of the OPCW investigates the matter resulted in nothing. Moreover, the inspectors were prosecuted for trying to get to the bottom of this issue.

Today's statement by Mr. Arias brings me back to this issue. Mr. Arias claims in his statement that none of the 193 States Members of the United Nations has questioned the findings of the final report on Douma. First, that is factually incorrect. Take our country, for example, and we are not the only ones to have questioned that. On many occasions, including today, the Director-General has said that much of the Douma investigation was carried out when the dissenting inspectors were no longer involved. For example, in his speech of 6 February 2020, he said:

(spoke in English)

“Both had no involvement in the last six months of the FFM investigation, when most of the analytical work took place”.

(spoke in Russian)

Furthermore, he said that some of the inspectors, especially one in Douma, played no role in the investigation. That is refuted by the available facts and documents. At the 15 April Security Council meeting, journalist Aaron Maté showed us with documents in hand that much of the work was undertaken in the first few months of the investigation when Inspector B. was still a key member of the FFM and the author of the original report. For example, comparing the original report with the final report, Maté showed that 70 per

cent of all samples were analysed in the first month, including 100 per cent of the wood samples. Can he explain what specific analytical work was done by the FFM in the last six months of the investigation? Perhaps it had to do with altering the original findings of the inspectors who investigated the case.

Secondly, in June 2018, the FFM approached four toxicologists and pharmacologists from NATO with expertise on chemical weapons. The materials of that meeting were leaked, and WikiLeaks published them. They show that the experts ruled out the use of chlorine as the cause of death of the victims filmed in Douma. That conclusion was acknowledged in the original report but was omitted in the final report. The final report also excluded the June meeting from the list of what the team had been doing. Why did the final report exclude the toxicologists' findings that chlorine was not the cause of the deaths of the victims whom we were shown?

The final report makes reference to later meetings with toxicologists in September and October, which are included among the meetings held by the Inquiry Team. However, the final report does not provide no information as to what conclusions the new toxicologists came to. Why and how did it happen that their conclusions became more important and allowed the findings of the first toxicologists to be ignored? Why does the final report not explain exactly what those toxicologists found? Why are their findings and conclusions not compared to those of the original toxicologists? Why were those first findings omitted from the report? I very much hope to have answers to those questions.

Thirdly, this is Syria's initial declaration under the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). We asked for an explanation of the differences in approach on that issue between Damascus and other countries that have faced similar problems but have not been subjected to the same barrage of criticism for it as Syria.

Fourthly, the methodology of the OPCW Technical Secretariat, which in its investigations relies on information from partisan sources opposed to the Syrian Government, collects evidence remotely and draws “highly likely” conclusions based on it. That is in direct contravention of the CWC, which has a chain-of-custody requirement to ensure that evidence is preserved. Moreover, former OPCW spokesman Mr. Lujan said in 2013 that the organization would

never examine samples that had not been collected by its inspectors in the field. It turns out that now the Technical Secretariat is openly violating its own declared principles and is not ashamed to admit it in its reports. We are interested in what measures the leadership of the OPCW Technical Secretariat intends to take to rectify the situation.

Another issue is the double standards of the OPCW Technical Secretariat in selecting sources of evidence. The OPCW inspection teams readily grasp any, even the weakest and most inconclusive, material from the infamous White Helmets, while evidence of the involvement of the opposition in the organization of provocations using chemical weapons provided by professionals — the Syrian authorities and the Russian military — is blatantly ignored, as well as the numerous confirmations by local witnesses, that is, living witnesses, of the staged nature of those incidents. In particular, that was once again confirmed in the FFM report on the November 2018 incident in Aleppo.

Time is running out and questions to the Director-General, as head of the OPCW's Technical Secretariat, are snowballing. Not only is the story of the Douma report not over, but there are more and more twists in it. It is now not even the OPCW inspectors themselves who are being persecuted but the independent experts who are trying to get to the bottom of this story. It is doubly sad that so-called independent and democratic Western media, such as the British Broadcasting Corporation, are joining the campaign to smear them. An appeal by prominent public figures, in particular the well-known non-governmental organization (NGO) the Courage Foundation, calling on the leadership of the Technical Secretariat to finally get to the bottom of the numerous irregularities in its work, including the evidence of fraud in the preparation of the report on Douma. We do not understand that selective approach. The Technical Secretariat actively cooperates with some NGOs, such as the White Helmets, and engages them in highly sensitive matters, while it blatantly turns its back on others that ask inconvenient questions. What kind of freedom of speech, transparency or consideration for the views of civil society are we talking about?

However, since last December, new questions have also emerged. First of all, they concern the new report of the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) on the Saraqib incident in February 2018, which was thrown in on the eve of the voting at the Conference of the States Parties to the CWC in April. None of the breaches in the

investigation methodology that we have been talking about for years have been corrected in it. The report itself reveals that the IIT never went to the scene of the incident. All the physical evidence was collected by representatives of the again infamous NGO White Helmets. Half of the witnesses interviewed, again for the most part White Helmets, and their testimony were analysed by anonymous so-called authoritative experts and scientific institutions. What kind of impartiality or chain-of-custody requirement can we talk about in such circumstances?

As with the case of Douma, it is not at all clear why Damascus would use chlorine in Saraqib and clearly expose itself to international criticism if it would not have benefited militarily or otherwise anyway? The IIT refers to the alleged use of just one chlorine cylinder in Saraqib, resulting in minor injuries to 12 people, who were discharged from hospital within two hours of arriving there. The group itself says that the Syrian army was not carrying out any offensive operations in the area during that period.

The report is full of other glaring inconsistencies, such as the testimony of pseudo-witnesses about helicopters flying at low altitude with their lights on, which, in fact, is unacceptable when carrying out combat missions at night, or a cylinder that somehow was-corroded in less than 12 hours after hitting the ground.

We would like Mr. Arias to comment on those points today.

But there is another element in the new IIT document that goes beyond any reasonable limit. Paragraph 5.18 states that one of the most likely motives for the chlorine air strike was “a ‘punishment’ for the downing of the Russian aircraft”. At the same time, the IIT draws that conclusion, citing an anonymous “military expert”.

We call on Mr. Arias to explain to us why the Technical Secretariat, which according to its leadership is engaged in strictly technical analysis, is going beyond its mandate and engaging in politicized conjecture? Who instructed the inspectors to include that deliberately false conclusion in the final document?

During the April Arria Formula meeting organized by Russia, one of the briefers — independent reporter Aaron Maté — asked the representatives of the United States and the United Kingdom whether they would support an investigation, conducted by the OPCW

Scientific Advisory Board, and with the participation of former inspectors of the FFM, into the manipulation of the FFM report. We have not heard an answer from our colleagues.

However, let me remind the Council that, according to paragraph 45 of section D of article VIII of the CWC, the responsibility for the activities of the Board lies with the OPCW Director-General. Therefore, we would like to ask Mr. Arias whether he would agree to organize a purely technical discussion within the framework of the OPCW Scientific Advisory Board, with the participation of well-known inspectors, to discuss all the inconsistencies concerning the Douma report. I think that our Western colleagues, who so actively advocate transparency and the depoliticization of the work of the OPCW, should welcome that. We are all interested in a frank and, as many delegations have emphasized, technical discussion among professionals. If Mr. Arias does not think it is possible to organize such a discussion in the OPCW Scientific Advisory Board, what other options can he suggest for resolving that situation? Is he ready to meet with former inspectors and discuss their concerns directly with them? We expect to hear answers to all these questions in the open part of today's meeting.

I want to emphasize that we have gathered in the Chamber today not, as some colleagues try to describe it, to cross-examine the OPCW Director-General by asking him inconvenient questions. This is a necessary collective effort to rectify the regrettable situation in the OPCW. An open discussion with the leadership of the organization is urgently needed in order to prevent further erosion of its authority and a repeat of the humiliating situation that occurred in April, when a decision was made at the Conference of the States Parties to deny a sovereign State complying with the Convention its rights. That decision was yet again pushed through in violation of Convention norms and the long-standing practice of consensus in the OPCW.

It is encouraging that, in fact, less than half of the OPCW member States voted for it, including only six Western States members of the current Security Council. The rest either voted against it or abstained in the voting. The same position was taken by a number of former members of the Security Council who participated in meetings on the Syrian issue last year and know the situation inside out.

In conclusion, we, like many other responsible participants in the CWC and as a country that stood at the origins of the OPCW, are concerned about the politicization of its work, which is being imposed on it by Western colleagues. The OPCW should be the guardian of the chemical non-proliferation regime and must not be turned into an instrument for implementing political interests or for punishing undesirables. Unfortunately, it is becoming increasingly likely that Syria is not the only State at risk and that any State could come under attack and be subject to pressure through the leverage of accusations of the use of chemical weapons.

The Security Council has a special responsibility to prevent such an outcome. We must all work to ensure that the OPCW is fully capable of implementing its mandate and remaining an impartial guardian of the chemical non-proliferation regime. Therefore, we hope that today's conversation with the Director-General of the OPCW will not be the last and will enable us to move at least somewhat closer to that goal. Russia is ready to further work in all forums to restore trust in the OPCW and strengthen its authority and to defend the foundations of the regime for the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Mr. Mills (United States of America): I thank the High Representative for her briefing today, and the United States welcomes the Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), Fernando Arias, to today's discussion. We thank him for his thorough presentation. And let me just say that the United States remains grateful for his commitment and leadership at the OPCW in upholding the norm against the use of chemical weapons.

We also want to thank the courageous men and woman who carry out the impartial and independent work of the OPCW, often doing so — as the Director-General has indicated — in dangerous and difficult conditions. Their service and professionalism should never be taken for granted. The United States, along with an overwhelming number of responsible nations, will continue to support the work of the OPCW in carrying out its critical mandate against the backdrop of the continued threat of chemical weapons use.

Let us be clear — the Al-Assad regime is responsible for innumerable atrocities, some of which rise to the level of war crimes and crimes against humanity. As the Security Council was briefed just this past April (see S/2021/337), the OPCW's Investigation and

Identification Team (IIT) released its second report. This report concluded that there were reasonable grounds to believe that the Syrian Arab Air Force used a chemical weapon in Saraqib, Syria, in February 2018. This act imposed deliberate and unconscionable suffering on Syrian victims.

The Al-Assad regime's use of chemical weapons against the Syrian people is well documented. The IIT has now attributed four separate chemical weapons attacks in Syria to the Al-Assad regime. These incidents are in addition to the four chemical weapons attacks attributed to the Al-Assad regime by the former OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism. The United States concurs with the OPCW's conclusions cited in this most recent report (see S/2021/415). Despite the OPCW's efforts to encourage and assist Syria to adhere to its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention and resolution 2118 (2013), the Al-Assad regime — supported by Russia — continues to ignore calls from the international community to fully disclose and verifiably destroy its chemical weapons programme. Without accountability for the atrocities committed against the Syrian people, lasting peace in Syria will remain out of reach. The United States once again calls for justice and accountability as critical components to help move Syria towards a political resolution to the conflict.

The United States welcomes the 21 April decision of the OPCW's Conference of the States Parties, which condemned, as we heard, Syria's use of chemical weapons and suspended its rights and its privileges under the Chemical Weapons Convention. This decision — the first time that the Conference of States Parties has taken such action — is in direct response to the Al-Assad regime's repeated use and possession of chemical weapons and its failure to complete the measures set out in the OPCW Executive Council's July 2020 decision. The adoption of this Conference of States Parties decision — which was overwhelmingly supported by nearly 90 nations around the world and opposed by only 15 — sends the clear and unequivocal message that the use of chemical weapons has consequences.

As we made clear at the Council's last meeting on this subject (S/2021/446), no amount of disinformation espoused by Syria and its very small number of supporters can negate or diminish the credibility of the evidence that has been presented to us by the OPCW. The Al-Assad regime must comply with its obligations

under the Chemical Weapons Convention and resolution 2118 (2013).

Mr. Pham (Viet Nam): At the outset, I thank Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu and the Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), Fernando Arias González, for their briefings.

I also welcome the participation of the representatives of Syria, Iran and Turkey in this meeting.

Let me start by reiterating Viet Nam's consistent policy of strongly supporting the non-proliferation and disarmament of weapons of mass destruction, including chemical weapons. Chemical weapons are indiscriminate and inhumane and can have long-term effects on human life in the environment. My delegation unequivocally condemns the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere and under any circumstances.

Sharing the common goal of saving succeeding generations from the scourge of these weapons, we re-emphasize the vital importance of the full implementation by all State parties of their obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). The role of the OPCW as the multilateral body entrusted with assisting the implementation of the CWC is pivotal to the achievement of that goal. In this regard, the work of the organization should be carried out in the most comprehensive, objective and impartial manner. These high standards, particularly in terms of the investigation of alleged Convention violations, should help establish irrefutable facts and evidence with a view to ensuring justice and in preventing violations.

On the issue of chemical weapons in Syria, we share the concerns over the alleged use of these weapons. The reported information regarding their possession and use by armed groups is also deeply troubling. While progress towards closing this file during the reporting period seems to have been limited, we would like to share the two factors that we deem essential.

The first is continued engagement between the OPCW and Syria. My delegation takes note of the monthly reports of the OPCW Director-General on this issue, including on the engagement between Technical Secretariat and Syria through technical meetings, field visits and exchange of letters. We call for close, continuous and constructive cooperation between the Declaration Assessment Team and the Syrian National

Authority in addressing the remaining issues relating to the initial declaration — the first step of a State party in implementing the CWC. We look forward to receiving updates on the outcomes of the consultations between the two sides, including on the new outstanding issue, as mentioned in the ninety-second report (see S/2021/514).

While taking note of the 21 April decision of the Conference of States Parties to the CWC, my delegation strongly believes that engagement needs to be enhanced constantly in order to move towards the closure of this protracted dossier.

Secondly, I turn to effective international cooperation. The divergent views on this matter are blocking our way towards the full implementation of the CWC and resolution 2118 (2013). It is crucial that the international community be united, including in The Hague and in New York. Accordingly, constructive and non-politicized international cooperation is extremely important to support the efforts of the OPCW Technical Secretariat and the Syrian Government in finding solutions. Differences must also be addressed constructively and must not be politicized.

In closing, Viet Nam would like to stress the need for a comprehensive political settlement of the crisis in Syria, led and owned by the Syrian themselves and facilitated by the United Nations, in full accordance with principles of international law and the Charter of the United Nations. That is the key to addressing all issues and bridging all differences, and the only path towards bringing back stability for the Syrian people.

Mr. De la Fuente Ramírez (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I recognize the participation in this meeting of the Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), Mr. Fernando Arias, to whom I reiterate Mexico's support for the work of the OPCW. I also thank Mrs. Nakamitsu for her detailed briefing. We also welcome the presence of the representatives of the Syrian Arab Republic, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Turkey.

My country has taken note of the report and of the areas where we continue to hope for full cooperation from Syria in declaring all agents produced and turned into weapons. Mexico urges Syria to consider a new round of talks with the Declaration Assessment Team in order to shed light on the issue of the presence of a neat chemical warfare agent found in September 2020 in the samples taken from large storage containers. We

also trust that inspections in Syria by the Fact-Finding Mission will continue at sites identified by the United Nations-OPCW Joint Investigation Mechanism and the Investigation and Identification Team. The cooperation of Syria is essential to ensuring that these missions can carry out their work. For example, it would be helpful for everyone to know whether there has been any progress in implementing the measures mandated by the OPCW Executive Council on 9 July 2020.

Mexico believes that ongoing dialogue between the Security Council and the OPCW is useful in making objective progress on some of the outstanding issues. At the same time, we believe that it would be worthwhile to reflect on the format of these monthly informational meetings. Mexico favours the idea of holding public meetings, which allow for greater transparency and accountability for the Security Council. Unfortunately, however, on the issue before us, these meetings have not led to progress in achieving the common goal we all share of preventing any possible use of chemical weapons in the region.

It is not very helpful to exchange views that are already well known, which promotes polarization at the expense of finding viable alternatives and complying with the provisions set forth by the Security Council.

Mexico reiterates its call on the Secretary-General to step up his good offices between Syria and the OPCW, as well as with interested parties, in order to work towards a solution of this matter, which has already been before us for many, many years.

If the Security Council is united in its condemnation of the use of chemical weapons by any actor and in any circumstances, it is therefore up to the Council to uphold the norm against the use of chemical weapons and their inhumane effects and to support the mandate of the OPCW, requesting that it play its due role, but we must also devote the same attention to listening.

Mexico will continue to follow any new developments closely. The only way to find a solution to this issue is through diplomatic means. We must therefore ensure that all relevant parties are always able to participate at the negotiating table.

Mr. Tirumurti (India): Let me begin by thanking Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu and the Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition

of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), Fernando Arias, for the briefings.

We have noted the contents of the latest report of the Director-General of the OPCW on the progress made in the elimination of the Syrian Chemical Weapons programme, published on 28 May (see S/2021/514). The report highlights the outstanding issues in the implementation of Syria's declaration and destruction obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention as well as the possible use of chemical weapons.

India views the Chemical Weapons Convention as a unique, non-discriminatory disarmament instrument which serves as a model for the elimination of an entire category of weapons of mass destruction. India attaches high importance to the Chemical Weapons Convention and stands for its full, effective and non-discriminatory implementation. It is important to maintain the credibility and integrity of the Convention. Further, India is against the use of chemical weapons by anybody, anywhere, at any time and under any circumstances.

India has consistently maintained that any investigation into the use of chemical weapons must be impartial, credible and objective, following scrupulously the provisions and procedures embedded in the Convention, and in conformity with the delicate balance of power and responsibility entrusted to it to establish facts and reach evidence-based conclusions. We again ask and expect the OPCW to follow those parameters scrupulously.

We encourage Syria to continue its cooperation with the OPCW to resolve pending issues, and we hope that the next round of Declaration Assessment Team-related consultations will take place soon.

India has been cautioning about the possibility of chemical weapons falling into the hands of terrorist entities and individuals. The latest report of the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (S/2021/419) refers to the repeated successful deployments of chemical weapons by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) against civilian populations between 2014 and 2016. That is a cause for serious concern and needs to be fully recognized and acted upon, given that the core area of operations of ISIL has been both Syria and Iraq. It is deeply concerning that the involvement of external actors in Syria has given a fillip to the growth of terrorism in the country and in the region. We are

concerned at the frequent reports of the resurgence of terrorist groups in the region. The international community cannot afford to ignore terrorist activities in Syria and the region.

Lastly, India has consistently called for a comprehensive and peaceful resolution of the Syrian conflict through a Syrian-led dialogue taking into account the legitimate aspirations of the people of Syria, facilitated by the United Nations, in line with resolution 2254 (2015). We note the results of the recent presidential elections in Syria, which fall within their sovereign purview. We reiterate our support for the United Nations-led efforts to find an expeditious resolution to the decade-long conflict in Syria.

Ms. Prince (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines): I thank Director-General Arias and the Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Mrs. Nakamitsu, for their informative briefings.

To begin, I will restate Saint Vincent and the Grenadines' well-established position that the use of chemical weapons anywhere and by anyone constitutes an abominable violation of international law. Chemical-weapons atrocities cannot be ignored, and impunity cannot be encouraged. Perpetrators must be held accountable. The Council and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) bears the tremendous responsibility of protecting the international non-proliferation regime, and future generations will judge us very harshly if we fail to act.

We therefore support the mandate of the OPCW and encourage efforts aimed at strengthening its capacities to ensure that the quality of its work is of the highest possible standard. We continue to reiterate that all facets and activities of the organization, including the work of the Fact-Finding Mission, the Identification and Investigation Team and the Declaration Assessment Team must be impartial, transparent and not politicized. The OPCW must be above reproach; anything less erodes trust, undermines its efforts and renders it ineffective. Its findings must be able to withstand rigorous scrutiny to enable States parties to maintain confidence in its processes. Further, consensus-based decisions ought to be pursued to prevent further polarization and divisiveness and to promote international cooperation.

We reiterate the importance of resolving the gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies in the initial chemical-weapons declaration. The continued cooperation of the Syrian Government is essential to

the ongoing process and the full implementation of resolution 2118 (2013). Despite the obstacles presented by the coronavirus disease pandemic, work must continue on this file, and we encourage the parties to remain committed to continuing technical consultations. The Technical Secretariat and the various teams ought to be provided with comprehensive information and given access to effectively fulfil their respective mandates. We hope that all parties will engage constructively in that regard.

Consequently, the elements of trust and confidence are critical, as without them cooperation becomes strained. We therefore have a duty to promote and facilitate dialogue between the Syrian Government and the OPCW. That not only demonstrates respect for the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity, but it also helps to foster much-needed trust and cooperation between the parties.

The weaponizing of toxic chemicals is unquestionably one of the great threats to international peace and security. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines shares the vision of a chemical-weapons-free world, and we support all efforts to make certain that applied science and technology are used only for the peace, progress and the prosperity of all humankind.

Mr. Geng Shuang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank High Representative Nakamitsu and Director-General Arias for their respective briefings.

The latest monthly report submitted by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) (see S/2021/514) states that the Technical Secretariat conducted a seventh round of inspections of the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Centre in November last year and found no chemicals or related activities that violated the provisions of the Chemical Weapons convention. The report also indicates that the Technical Secretariat is in communication with Syria on the timing of the next round of consultations. We hope that the two sides will finalize the relevant arrangements as soon as possible and continue to resolve outstanding issues through dialogue and consultation.

The report covers the activities of the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT), the ninety-fourth session of the Executive Council and the actions taken at the twenty-fifth Conference of the States Parties. It must be pointed out that those actions are highly controversial and have significantly deviated from the right track of resolving the Syrian chemical-weapons issue.

The Convention authorizes only fact-finding investigations into the alleged use of chemical weapons and does not authorize the identification of perpetrators. The establishment of the IIT overstepped the authorization of the Convention and was replete with political motives and inconsistent with the technical nature of the OPCW.

Some countries have forced votes at the OPCW, including a vote at the twenty-fifth Conference of the States Parties, held in April, which led to a decision supported by less than half of the States Parties to suspend Syria's right to vote and stand for election. Half of the members of the Security Council did not support that decision, which speaks volumes about the controversial nature of that decision.

China expresses its deep concern at the high degree of politicization of the OPCW's work and the deep division of the States parties. Maintaining the authority and effectiveness of the Convention and bringing the OPCW's work back on to the right track as soon as possible is the common responsibility of all States parties. It is also the only viable way to resolve the Syrian chemical-weapons issue.

China calls on all States parties to maintain and practice multilateralism in its true spirit, uphold the Convention as a yardstick, remain committed to consultation and cooperation and refrain from being confrontational. We hope that the OPCW will adhere to the principles of independence, objectivity and impartiality and play a positive and constructive role in achieving the goal of a chemical-weapons free world.

Mr. Kiboino (Kenya): I thank Mrs. Nakamitsu, who is here in person today for her regular briefing, as well as Mr. Fernando Arias for his comprehensive presentation. We also welcome the representatives of Syria, Iran and Turkey.

We take note of the ninety-second monthly report (see S/2021/514) of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the submission of the ninetieth monthly report by the Syrian Arab Republic.

Kenya reaffirms its support for the mandate of the OPCW and its important responsibility in relation to the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention. Kenya condemns any use of chemical weapons by any actor and under any circumstances. The use of chemical weapons is a special category of threat — not only to the Syrian people but also to the international community.

Their use anywhere, by any party, threatens to open the door to their widening and escalating use. It is therefore not an overstatement to argue that future generations may condemn or praise how this situation is dealt with now by the Security Council and its members.

The gravity and sense of urgency in dealing with this matter needs to inform the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013). In particular, there is need to inject sufficient measures to reinforce the required faith and confidence in the work and processes of the OPCW. We can move forward if members embrace pragmatic approaches that cool down politically charged perceptions of its management and decision-making structures in relation to this agenda item.

A prompt conclusion and closure of the ongoing investigations will bring about optimism for a peaceful Syria. We therefore encourage the Syrian Arab Republic and the OPCW to collaborate better and finalize their work. We are encouraged that the Declaration Assessment Team continues its efforts to clarify all outstanding issues. We welcome the Team's deployment to Syria from 28 May to 11 June 2021 and look forward to its report.

I reiterate that Kenya stands with the people of Syria. We believe that their peace and security will emerge only from a political solution achieved through an inclusive Syrian-led dialogue.

We will continue to urge all parties to be vigilant in their engagement, in multiple ways, with militant groups that adhere to the aims of Al-Qaida and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Shams. Too often, short-term expediency when dealing with such groups has turned out to be extremely harmful to the international community.

Dame Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom): I thank Director-General Arias and Mrs. Nakamitsu for their briefings today. This is the third time the Director-General has briefed the Security Council in the past two years. I think that underlines the Security Council's enduring concern at the use of these banned weapons, as well as the importance the Director-General places on dialogue and collaboration between the Council and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

I would also like to thank the Director-General for the work of the various teams of the OPCW Technical Secretariat, as set out in his monthly reports to the Council. Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic

and the intense scrutiny under which the Technical Secretariat operates, it is clear that the OPCW continues to implement the duties conferred on it objectively and professionally and to prioritize dialogue, cooperation, discretion and candour with the Syrian authorities and OPCW States parties.

The United Kingdom's position on this issue is well known, and I would like to underline three points.

First, we remain deeply concerned about the unresolved issues in Syria's initial chemical-weapons declaration, which now stands at 20. Coupled with the independent findings of the United Nations and the OPCW, which, with the latest Investigation and Identification Team report, have now attributed eight chemical-weapons attacks to the Syrian regime, it is clear that Syria retained a chemical-weapons capability and the willingness to use it after 2013.

Secondly, the retention of that capability means there is an ongoing risk of further use of chemical weapons. Given the unaccounted-for whereabouts of significant amounts of chemical agents and munitions, there is also the potential for those weapons to fall into the hands of other groups with an intent to use them.

Thirdly, and for that reason, we will continue to insist on Syria's full cooperation with the OPCW, in accordance with resolution 2118 (2013), and on the full and verified destruction of Syria's chemical-weapons programme, so that the ongoing threat to international peace and security can be neutralized to the satisfaction of the international community.

I would like to take advantage of the Director-General's presence to ask two questions.

First, resolution 2118 (2013) requires Syria to cooperate fully. How does one assess the cooperation of the Syrian Arab Republic? After seven years of work and 20 unresolved issues in Syria's declaration, what are the next steps and what more is required to start to reduce the number of issues and move towards a resolution?

Secondly, with regard to the methodology of the Investigation and Identification Team, could the Director-General set out the starting point of the investigation and tell us more about how the Team gathers evidence and conducts the investigation? Does it simply accept the Fact-Finding Mission's findings, or does it question them?

Ms. Heimerback (Norway): I would like to thank High Representative Nakamitsu for her briefing on the most recent monthly report (see S/2021/514) on the progress towards the full elimination of the Syrian chemical-weapons programme. I would also like to thank Director-General Arias and to reiterate Norway's steadfast confidence in him and the work of the Technical Secretariat of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

Norway regrets to note that the monthly report from the OPCW yet again describes very little progress and that the planned May deployment of the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) did not happen. We are also concerned that the Syrian Arab Republic has not responded to the DAT's proposed rescheduled deployment. We encourage the Syrian authorities to respond in a timely fashion so that the DAT can confirm its next round of inspections, which remain an essential component of the verification regime in order to ensure that activities are consistent with the objectives of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

We reiterate our concern that such a large number of issues — now 20 — remain outstanding. We urge Syria to fully cooperate with the OPCW and provide further information about the types and quantities of chemical agents produced and/or weaponized in certain inspected facilities. Again, the Syrian Arab Republic must fulfil its obligations pursuant to the Chemical Weapons Convention and resolution 2118 (2013). We also call on Syria to implement the necessary measures in order to lift the suspension of its rights and privileges as a State party to the Chemical Weapons Convention.

The elimination of chemical weapons in Syria requires urgency. For far too long, numerous issues have been left outstanding, and many questions have been left unanswered, both for the international community and the people of Syria. Accountability for the use of chemical weapons remains a priority, and we reiterate the statement of the International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons of 18 May, which Norway fully supports.

There is a global norm against the use of chemical weapons. As a Council, we cannot ignore violations and allow the vital international norm to erode.

Mr. Aougi (Niger) (*spoke in French*): I thank Mrs. Izumi Nakamitsu and Mr. Fernando Arias for their briefings. I thank the representatives of Syria, Iran and Turkey for their participation in today's meeting.

The prevention and deterrence of the production and use of chemical weapons rests on our ability to respect and enforce the provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention. The role of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in this regard is essential. It is therefore crucial for this quasi-universal organization to continue to work towards this goal by ensuring that it builds the confidence of Member States through transparency and by fostering a spirit of consensus in its deliberations.

Similarly, the OPCW Technical Secretariat must adopt more inclusive and inclusive approaches in its work so as to ensure that the conclusions of its work are accepted by all. It is regrettable that, eight years after the unanimous adoption of resolution 2118 (2013), the issue of the elimination of the Syrian chemical arsenal and the responsibilities for the use of these weapons has still not been completely resolved. There is a lack of consensus on how to deal with this issue, and the definitive identification of the perpetrators is an impediment to the accountability of the real perpetrators, to the detriment of the victims who are waiting for justice.

As the primary body responsible for eliminating threats to international peace and security, the Security Council must show unity in closing this file and focus on the other equally important aspects of this crisis, notably the humanitarian situation and the political process. The credibility of the Council and the authority of the OPCW are at stake.

In the light of the foregoing, I would like to make the following remarks. First, my delegation would like to reiterate that any action other than that aimed at the full implementation of resolution 2118 (2013) and the OPCW report and its conclusions should be avoided.

Secondly, cooperation between Syria and the OPCW Technical Secretariat must continue and be in good faith in order to resolve all outstanding issues, including advancing the work of the Declarations Assessment Team. To this end, my delegation notes the Syrian Government's continued efforts to shed light on the use of these weapons on its territory through its communications with the OPCW and the Security Council and its willingness to continue to work with the Technical Secretariat by ensuring greater access for it to listed sites across Syria in the conduct of its investigations.

Thirdly, my delegation calls on the United Nations, the Syrian Arab Republic and the OPCW Technical Secretariat to cooperate more closely on this issue and pay rigorous attention to all allegations of chemical-weapons use throughout Syria.

In conclusion, the Niger reiterates its position that the use of chemical weapons, for whatever reason and by whomever, remains unjustifiable and in contravention of international law. We support the work of the OPCW and its Technical Secretariat to ensure that no one suffers the effects of these prohibited weapons ever again.

Ms. Byrne Nason (Ireland): I would like to thank Director-General Arias for his briefing today. Ireland has full confidence in his leadership in guiding the work of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). I also want to thank Under-Secretary General Nakamitsu for her briefing.

The OPCW plays an essential role as the impartial and technical body mandated by the international community to address chemical weapons. The professionalism and integrity of the staff of the OPCW is clear, and we deeply regret that some Council members continue once again today to challenge and undermine their work without any factual basis. We remain deeply worried by the lack of progress by Syria in addressing the serious and growing list of issues to be resolved under its initial declaration.

It is asserted by some in this Chamber that these issues are not significant, that there are similar issues with other States' initial declarations and that Syria is being treated differently. Like others before me, I would like to ask Director-General Arias for his reflections on this aspect and how we should assess Syria's efforts to address these issues in the seven years since the Declaration Assessment Team was formed, in particular given the very serious nature of many of these outstanding issues. It would also be interesting to hear how the Director-General would assess the level of cooperation provided by Syria and the nature of its responses to issues raised by the OPCW.

Equally, Syria has placed great emphasis on the material it has circulated on the possible possession of chemical weapons by non-State actors in Syria. I would ask for the Director-General's assessment of the materials supplied by Syria as well as the country's cooperation in efforts to follow up on this information.

We must separate the facts from the noise. In the end, what is evident is that Syria must fulfil its legal obligations. It must cooperate fully with the OPCW. It must resolve the serious issues with its declaration. It must ensure that its entire stocks of chemical weapons are declared and verifiably destroyed.

Those responsible for the attacks at Ltamenah and Saraqib, as well as the multiple other documented chemical-weapons attacks conducted by Syrian forces, must be held to account. Impunity cannot be an option. The use of chemical weapons anywhere and at any time is abhorrent and unacceptable. The Security Council should be united and firm in its response to any use of these terrible weapons. We must effectively uphold the international prohibition against them. This is what the Conference of State Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention has done in April through their action on Syrian non-compliance. It is regrettable that we on the Council have been unable to provide a similarly clear response.

Mr. Ladeb (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Mrs. Nakamitsu, and the Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), Ambassador Arias, for their briefings. I also welcome the participation of the representatives of Syria, Iran and Turkey in today's meeting.

At the outset, Tunisia reiterates its firm condemnation of the use of chemical weapons anywhere, by anyone and under any circumstances, regardless of the motivations and justifications. We emphasize the need to hold the perpetrators of such horrendous crimes accountable.

Given the complexity of the situation in Syria, it is necessary to join efforts and work to find a margin for consensus solutions and constructive engagement to address ongoing and emerging problems of the Syrian dossier based on international law and relevant Security Council resolutions, and through more confidence building.

Tunisia expresses once again its support for the regime of the prohibition and non-proliferation of chemical weapons. It is a regime based on rules, consensus and multilateralism with a view to ending the chemical threat to humanity. Tunisia also supports the mandate of the OPCW, whose mission is critical to carrying out the responsibilities of independent and impartial verification, including in the Syrian Arab

Republic, by providing a platform for consultation and cooperation among States on relevant issues.

We have taken note of the ongoing efforts to advance the dialogue between the Declaration Assessment Team and the Syrian Government. In that regard, we urge both parties to resume the necessary regular and continuous technical consultations as soon as possible in the context of constructive engagement and mutual trust in order to achieve rapid progress in resolving outstanding issues and ensure that Syria fulfils its contractual obligations.

We reiterate the importance of the organization's Technical Secretariat continuing its work in Syria in accordance with its mandate, while ensuring that thorough, transparent and impartial investigations are conducted into the allegations of the use of toxic chemicals as weapons by any party, including by terrorist groups, whose presence and spread in some parts of Syria still constitute a challenge to Syria and the international community in general. Such groups do not legally or morally recognize the ban on chemical weapons. That will also require facilitating regular field access for the various Technical Secretariat teams to Syrian territory, in coordination with the Syrian Government, while taking into account the challenges still posed by the coronavirus disease pandemic.

In conclusion, the international community and the Security Council need to coordinate efforts and shoulder the responsibility entrusted to them to monitor the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention and resolution 2118 (2013) in order to eliminate the chemical threat, ensure the rule of law and accountability, restore trust in the effectiveness of chemical-weapons prohibition regime and prevent their proliferation, in the service of international peace and security.

Mr. De Rivière (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Mrs. Nakamitsu for her briefing as well as the Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) for participating in our meeting today. This is an excellent opportunity to set the record straight.

Reading the latest OPCW report (see S/2021/514), I see once again that the situation is not improving. On the contrary, the presence of a neat chemical warfare agent, found in storage containers, has led to the start of a new outstanding issue. This issue is one more in a long list. The Syrian regime has still not responded

to the new request for the deployment of the original Declaration Assessment Team. I would therefore like to ask the Director-General a simple question: how does he assess Syria's cooperation with the OPCW, in particular with regard to the initial declaration more than seven years after the adoption of resolution 2118 (2013)?

Decision C-25/Dec.9, adopted at the twenty-fifth Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention, was necessary. We could not allow a State party to blatantly and repeatedly violate its international commitments without reacting. It is now up to Syria to comply with its obligations if it wishes to restore its rights and privileges.

The issuance of the second report of the Investigation and Identification Team was prepared completely independently. It highlights once again the crimes of the Syrian regime. We know that the Syrian Arab Air Force dropped a chlorine cylinder by helicopter on Saraqib. The conclusions are clear; the evidence is irrefutable. Yet some countries are questioning that report in a very unconvincing way. I would therefore like to ask the Director-General again, if I may, to explain to us the methodology that was followed by the Investigation and Identification Team to reach those conclusions?

I repeat every month, and will continue to do so, that the use of these shocking weapons cannot go unpunished. Legal proceedings will take place, including before national courts. Those proceedings will be based in particular on the reports of the OPCW. That is why I say to the Director-General that his work is so important. The evidence continues to be collected and will be used. That is the message that we are pushing with our partners, in particular within the International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons. In that regard, finally, let me ask the Director-General how the exchange of information and cooperation with the United Nations International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism works?

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

I thank High Representative Izumi Nakamitsu and the Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), Mr. Fernando Arias, for their briefings. We appreciate their participation today and the opportunity to have a transparent and open discussion with them about

the progress in the elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme.

The most recent — the ninety-second — monthly report of the Director-General (see S/2021/446) raises several concerns in reflecting very little progress, if not even regress, in the efforts to close the gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies in the initial declaration. There are unanswered questions pertaining to a former chemical-weapons production facility. A new outstanding issue has been opened with regard to the finding of a neat chemical warfare agent. Sufficient explanation is still lacking with regard to a detection of a Schedule 2.B.04 chemical at the Barzah facilities.

Those are not just minor technical or theoretical issues but indicate that Syria has not declared and destroyed all its chemical weapons and their production facilities and continues to pose a threat to international peace and security. The second report of the Investigation and Identification Team, which affirmed all together now the eighth instance of chemical weapons use by the Syrian regime, is the latest reminder of that.

There is no hiding the fact that there are serious shortcomings in Syrian cooperation with the OPCW. It is regretful that the deployment of the Declaration Assessment Team for the next round of consultations is on hold pending Syria's response. Given the seriousness of the outstanding issues, we hope that the consultations between the OPCW and Syria can take place soon.

We should not forget that chemical weapons are a particularly gruesome and indiscriminate type of warfare. That is why they were comprehensively outlawed by the Chemical Weapons Convention. That is why the Security Council determined in resolution 2118 (2013) that the use of chemical weapons anywhere and by anyone constitutes a threat to international peace and security and expressed its strong conviction that those individuals responsible for the use of chemical weapons must be held accountable. The Security Council must live up to its words. Impunity, tolerance and inaction cannot be an option when chemical weapons are used against civilian populations.

I will conclude by expressing Estonia's full support for the professional and impartial work of the OPCW Technical Secretariat and for its leadership and experts. For the past seven years, they have been under intense scrutiny, but have shown nothing less but integrity and dedication to the task of upholding the norm against the use of chemical weapons.

I take this opportunity to also pose a couple of questions to Mr. Arias.

Several of our colleagues have already raised the question of cooperation. The fact is that, after seven years, the Syrian declaration remains open. My question is: what are the main obstacles that prohibit making tangible progress in resolving the outstanding issues concerning the declaration?

My second question pertains to the accusations and notifications of terrorist use of chemical weapons in Syria. Can Mr. Arias walk us through how those notifications are dealt with by the OPCW and what have been the outcomes?

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I will now give the floor to the briefers to respond to the questions posed and comments made, bearing in mind that they will also have an opportunity to make further comments in the consultations that follow this meeting.

I now give the floor to Mrs. Nakamitsu.

Mrs. Nakamitsu: I believe there were no questions posed to me.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. Arias to respond to comments and questions raised.

Mr. Arias: I thank you, Mr. President, for your kind words of support and for your invitation to brief the Security Council. At this meeting, the Security Council has accepted to be briefed and to respond to my questions in an open format. I communicated that to you, Sir, in the first contact we had on the telephone, underlining that the Russian delegation insisted in December that it wanted to have an open meeting with a briefing, statements, questions and responses in an open format. I am very pleased that the Security Council accepted this format upon the suggestion of the Russian Federation in December.

Some of the responses will be valid for several questions because some of the questions are very similar.

I will start with the questions posed by the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation, who said that perhaps his were inconvenient questions. I must say that I do not consider them to be inconvenient at all. I am used to responding to the questions of my

colleague at The Hague Ambassador Shulgin. We have a very good, close and friendly relationship. I respond to all the questions he poses. Sometimes the questions are difficult to respond to, but I am used to it and I do not mind at all.

The Russian Ambassador should not worry — we are good guardians of the Chemical Weapons Convention and the non-proliferation regime. We do our best. I am going to try to give him as much information as I can in my responses.

A general comment: what I was pleased to realize is that there is general support for the implementation of the Convention by the members of the Security Council. I appreciate that very much, and I also appreciate the comments supporting the work of the Technical Secretariat of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

Let us start with Douma, since that has been mentioned frequently in this meeting. In a few sentences, let us refresh our memories. On 7 April 2018, there were reports that alleged the use of chemical weapons in Douma. On 12 April 2018, the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission in Syria deployed. The Fact-Finding Mission deployed to Beirut just five days later, because it was not allowed to go to Damascus for three days for reasons that were justified. On 15 April, exactly eight days after the deployment, the Fact-Finding Mission arrived in Damascus. On 6 July 2018, the Fact-Finding Mission was able to produce an interim report.

The interim report was based on some samples that had been sent to designated labs. The interim report was completed, with a final report produced by the time I had become Director-General of the organization in March 2019. The designated labs, as Council members know, are completely independent labs. They cooperate with the organization, they work in a completely independent way and they have the highest professional standards. All the designated labs agreed that a chlorinated organic chemical — the report says “molecular chlorine”, a reactive chlorine — was found in the samples. There were not only two or three samples; more than 100 samples were collected and analysed. Most of the samples were analysed after the summer of 2018, when the two inspectors who have already been mentioned were completely uninvolved in the tasks of the Fact-Finding Mission.

Some argue that the report of the Fact-Finding Mission has something to do with attribution. The Fact-

Finding Mission has a clear mandate. It is to establish the facts related to the origin of the attack in connection with the chemical weapon used, and not to the origin of the perpetrators, or the persons who could be involved. Its mandate is only related to the chemical weapon used in the attack. That is the subject of the report of the Fact-Finding Mission.

Two former inspectors have been mentioned at this meeting, and they are both making claims with regard to the origin of the chemicals that could be related to those who are responsible for the attacks. The OPCW does a completely independent investigation, and those inspectors were part of the inspection carried out by the team of the Fact-Finding Mission.

Inspector A was never a part of the Fact-Finding Mission team that went to Douma. We have a permanent office in Damascus — called the Command Post — and we always have one inspector there on a rotating basis. That inspector, who is there for a couple of months at a time, is in charge of providing general support to the different missions that we have in Syria. Inspector A, who claims to know a lot about the attack in Douma, was, as usual, requested to support the tasks of the Fact-Finding Mission, as he happened to be in the Command Post at the time of the deployment. He had no access to all the information. He stopped working in the summer of July 2018, when he came back from his assignment at the Command Post in Damascus and was assigned to prepare an inventory of the two cylinders that were analysed in Douma. He contacted companies and engaged professors at a university without authorization, and he produced the report that some media have called the “engineering report”. That report is only a personal, private report of Inspector A. It was unauthorized and used incomplete information, and it was written after having illegally provided highly protected information to persons outside the organization who had nothing to do with the Fact-Finding Mission. Inspector A stopped providing support — support only — to the Fact-Finding Mission more than six months before the final report was released by me on 1 March 2019.

Inspector B, mentioned here today, was, after many years working in the organization, appointed for the first time as a member of the Fact-Finding Mission in April 2018. He could not be deployed on-site in Douma because he had not completed his special training. He was involved in the drafting of the interim report of the Fact-Finding Mission related to Douma. He confirmed in writing — and I have the document — to

senior management in the organization, at that time, because I was not yet here, that he agreed with the interim report's conclusions. Inspector B departed the organization in August 2018 — and, to be accurate, he left at the beginning of August because he had holidays and did not work on anything related to the Fact-Finding Mission during the rest of August.

The Fact-Finding Mission, after Inspector B departed, worked for more than six months, during which the bulk of the results of the investigation were obtained by the team. For instance, out of the more than 100 samples, more than 70 results were obtained in those final six months of investigation.

The conclusions of the reports produced personally by Inspector B are, of course, erroneous and uninformed. Because a lot of misguided information has been shared about the Douma case, when I have the opportunity I quote the report of the International Independent Commission of Inquiry — the so-called Pinheiro report — to the General Assembly in August 2018 — that is, around seven months before the Douma report was released to me on 1 March 2019. That report of the Pinheiro Commission contains a paragraph that refers to the Douma attack as follows:

“Throughout 7 April, numerous aerial attacks were carried out in Douma, striking various residential areas. A vast body of evidence collected by the Commission suggests that, at approximately 7.30 p.m., a gas cylinder containing a chlorine payload delivered by helicopter struck a multi-storey residential apartment building located approximately 100 metres south-west of Shohada square. The Commission received information on the death of at least 49 individuals, and the wounding of up to 650 others.” (*A/HRC/39/65, para. 92*)

This report refers to helicopters, cylinders, chlorine, many people's deaths and apartment buildings — much more than the report we produced almost seven months later as the result of the investigation of the Fact-Finding Mission. Our report is deeper but concentrates more on the mandate of the Fact-Finding Mission, which refers only to the establishment of the kind of chemical used in an attack.

The Douma report is based on what were the standard reasonable grounds to establish which toxic chemical weapon was used, and this toxic chemical contained reactive chlorine. The Executive Council

discussed the report in session, and no one rejected the report.

It was said earlier in this meeting by the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation that there were some doubts about what I have said. I have here in front of me note verbal No. 759, from the Russian Embassy in The Hague dated 26 April 2019, which includes an attachment: a Russian Federation paper containing commentary on the conclusions of the report of the Fact-Finding Mission to Douma. This note verbal required me to disseminate the attached paper. It stated, as a conclusion, that the Russian Federation did not challenge the findings contained in the Fact-Finding Mission report regarding the possible presence of molecular chlorine in the cylinders, et cetera. This text is available on the webpage of the organization.

The two inspectors who have been accused or pressured openly violated their obligations to the organization. That is why we organized an internal investigation, which produced a report that all members of the Council have.

Regarding the question of reopening the case and suggestions of organizing a briefing with all the inspectors and the Scientific Advisory Board, I have to say that the report of the Fact-Finding Mission related to Douma is in the hands of the Executive Council and the Conference. The Director-General has no authority whatsoever to reopen this investigation, which concluded and reported to the Executive Council, and through it to the Conference. The matter is in the hands of the policymaking organs and not of the Director-General. The Executive Council was already seized of the matter in March 2019.

In connection with the Scientific Advisory Board and the possibility of a meeting, I will expound on the information now. This means that reopening an investigation or organizing anything related to reassessing the findings of the Fact-Finding Mission related to the Douma attack would require a decision of the policymaking organs of the OPCW.

In connection with the Scientific Advisory Board, lately I received a lot of queries, especially from one country, as to why the Scientific Advisory Board does not meet with the two inspectors referred to earlier. In 2004, the Conference of the States Parties directed the Director-General to establish a body called the Scientific Advisory Board. The goal of the Scientific Advisory Board, as written in the terms of reference,

is to enable the Director-General to render specialized advice in connection with very sophisticated or complicated matters and issues related to chemicals and chemical weapons, which means that the Scientific Advisory Board has no role in assessing the findings of the Fact-Finding Mission. The Fact-Finding Mission is entrusted with investigating and subsequently producing a report — a report that I merely sign; I do not touch it. It goes directly to the policymaking organs — in this case, the Executive Council. This means that the Scientific Advisory Board has no authority to reassess an investigation of the Fact-Finding Mission or to assess any opinion of the inspectors in their personal capacity.

I realize, also, that some in the Chamber are interested in the Declaration Assessment Team. Again, a very clear question has been raised, querying why no State party has been under such a stringent verification regime — of our 193 States parties, why has not a single one been put under such a stringent verification regime as Syria? The response is clear, and it is not mine; it is in Article IV, paragraph 8, of the Chemical Weapons Convention — specifically, the framework for the accession of a possessor State. We are talking here about the framework for a possessor State to join the Convention more than 10 years after its entry into force in 1997. After exactly 29 April 2007, any possessor State having acceded to the Convention has to destroy the chemical weapons that it possesses following an order of destruction and a procedure of verification established by the OPCW Executive Council. That means that it was the Executive Council of the organization that determined the order of destruction and the procedures for the verification of the declared chemical weapons in Syria.

That decision of the Executive Council was taken on 27 September 2013 and was endorsed by resolution 2118 (2013), I think it was the same day or perhaps a few days later. What happened after Syria's accession to the organization? Several States parties started to express concern about the accuracy and completeness of Syria's initial declaration. That is why my predecessor, following the normal legal procedure, put in place the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) in April 2014.

What was the goal of the DAT? The DAT is not an investigative body. It is in charge of verifying that the initial declaration of the Syrian Arab Republic was accurate and complete through technical consultations, high-level reviews, visits to sites, samples, analyses and

interviews — everything in close cooperation with the authorities of the Syrian Arab Republic.

After more than seven years of joint work, the DAT has not yet been able to put on my desk a document saying that the original declaration of the Syrian Arab Republic is accurate and complete.

New elements initially not declared or stated by the Syrian Arab Republic have emerged. I shall mention several of them. They include one chemical-weapons production facility, four research and development facilities, five chemical-weapons agents and thousands of large-calibre chemical-weapons munitions. We have been working with the Syrian Arab Republic through the DAT for several years, during 24 rounds of consultations. The original declaration has been amended 17 times, each time because of the proposals the DAT made on the basis of the information that it was getting. Today we still have 20 outstanding issues. Their number counts, but their nature also counts. Why? Because hundreds of tons of agents and munitions were reported to have been destroyed or consumed prior to accession, but we cannot verify that that happened.

Secondly, three chemical agents have been found in samples by the DAT. That is another pending issue; it has not been clarified.

Thirdly, the declarable activities of the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Centre are inaccurate and incomplete. As everybody knows, the Centre is the place where all the research and development programmes on chemical weapons took place.

Fourthly, the quantity of chemical-warfare agents is not clear. The production or weaponization of the chemical-weapons production facility that has been discovered is not clear. We have even discovered samples that reveal that production has taken place in a former chemical-weapons storage facility that was declared; what was not declared was its production.

I can provide additional information on the last two outstanding issues; one of them arose after the twenty-third round of consultations in Syria by the DAT in September 2020. They went to analyse large storage containers that had previously been declared as a chemical-weapons site. We took samples; the samples were analysed, and, of course, the explanation so far has not been completed. That is why we put it as an outstanding issue. One of the chemicals detected in

those containers is a neat chemical-warfare agent; it is undeclared, so we put it as a new outstanding issue.

We have asked the Syrian Arab Republic to respond to what the Council mentioned. What can we do? We have requested the Syrian Arab Republic to provide documents and to organize more meetings with us to visit two sites. We have not been able to go again because the visas have not been issued. Indeed, I am afraid that we will not be able to go until the end of summer. Council members are well aware of the fact that in summer it gets very hot at the sites and that we cannot deploy because the inspectors and experts must wear very heavy protective suits and carry very heavy equipment, so it is really impossible for them to work in the summer. The postponement of the DAT dates, as I mentioned in my opening statement, may mean that the DAT will not be able to go to the Syrian Arab Republic until the end of the summer.

In connection with the two sites that have been inspected in relation to the Scientific Studies and Research Centre — Barzah and Jamrayah — we are inspecting them; we are in charge of verifying that no research, development, production or stockpiling of chemical weapons is taking place there. During the third round of inspections, in November 2018, the DAT discovered a Schedule 2.B.04 chemical, which is a degradation of a product included in the list of Schedule 1 chemicals. The Schedule 1 chemical is listed in the annex of chemicals to the Convention, which has the same value as the treaty. It is a list of the most dangerous chemicals that exist and that are usable only for warfare purposes. The Syrian Arab Republic has not yet provided an explanation.

I now turn to the working methods of the Fact-Finding Mission. The Fact-Finding Mission was set up in 2014, as the Council is aware, and, I would stress, is in charge of establishing the facts relating to allegations of chemical weapons use. It has nothing to do with finding the perpetrators, those responsible for the use of chemical weapons, only the facts. That means that the Fact-Finding Mission is in charge of establishing if a chemical has been used as a chemical weapon or not. It uses standard methodology. The Fact-Finding Mission is a young body, as it was set up only in 2014. There is a long tradition of commissions of inquiry, and these are standard methodologies. The methodology used by the Fact-Finding Mission in its investigation is reflected in the facts that the mission has reported. We very much stress that the reports must be detailed, so

that Member States all know about the process that led to the conclusions reached.

Sometimes it is difficult to go on-site, of course. In those cases, our approach is to analyse everything we can on the basis of the information provided by witnesses and medical personal and documents of all kinds — satellite imagery, forensic analysis, metallurgy, military engineering, photos and videos. In other words, we adopt a holistic approach and come to conclusions when the various missions and teams see that all the information leads to the same origin, that one piece of information after another corroborates the whole. That is the system we need.

Sometimes people ask why we do not give them more information related to the consultants, medical personnel, hospitals and designated labs we use? I do not go into those details because I cannot. It would make no sense, because witnesses need to be protected. That is also true in other places. Police and judges have to protect the witnesses. We too have to protect our sources. As such, the names of the designated labs are not published. The names of the witnesses are not published. The names of the consultants we use are not published. We cannot publish that information because we want to guarantee their protection and independence, that is, no interference in their work.

Every report of the Fact-Finding Mission has detailed information — the facts collected, the analysis made and the methodologies applied. These respond to long-standing international standards that we have not invented. We do not leave anything out of our conclusions. The processes that lead the Technical Secretariat have been presented repeatedly, in detail, to the Security Council and to the OPCW Executive Council.

The Security Council, the Conference of the States Parties and the Executive Council of the OPCW have produced resolutions and decisions, many times on the basis of the work of the Technical Secretariat. I understand that my responses do not satisfy everyone, especially one Ambassador in particular. I am very sorry for that; I cannot please everybody. There is nothing that can alter the reality; I cannot change the truth.

In connection with the insistence to release information related to teams of experts we have hired, I have to say that I have a really important responsibility. The Director-General of the OPCW has the primary responsibility to protect the information in the

organization and must adopt, on the basis of his judgment, a decision on whether to disclose information, but that must always be done on the basis of safeguarding the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention. In addition, part of the information is automatically protected and confidential, such as when it belongs to a State that provides it or when it affects a certain State. Without the authorization from that member State, we cannot publish that information.

Those are the rules; I did not invent them. The rules to protect the information are based on the Policy on Confidentiality document adopted in February 2006 by the Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention, as well as on the annex on confidentiality to the Chemical Weapons Convention. The annexes to the Convention have the same value as the Convention itself. As a result, those requirements are very serious, and I must respect them.

I know that the majority is interested in my comments on the second report of the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT). I will comment on that if I have the time, but I would prefer to start with the first report. The Fact-Finding Mission has been producing reports, and the IIT uses those reports, but it also investigates, with additional sources of information.

The second report of the IIT, covering the period of April 2020 to April 2021, in connection with an attack on Saraqib, concluded that on 4 February 2018, at approximately 9.22 p.m., a military helicopter belonging to the Syrian air force and controlled by the Tiger Forces dropped at least one cylinder releasing chlorine — a toxic gas — and affected 12 individuals. The chlorine that was released is not the chemical one can find in a market for cleaning at home. It is a special chlorine.

The information used by the investigation carried out by the IIT was based on the information provided in the second report — although the first report is very similar — by State parties that have given us a lot of important, needed information. We also conducted many interviews, analysis of samples, analysis of remnants in the field, analysis of glass-dispersion models, forensic studies and topographic studies. All of these together — and perhaps I am forgetting some — make up 400 gigabytes of information, assessed holistically by a very competent team, with the support of the specialized team of the rest of the Technical Secretariat, of course.

The methods reflect the best practices of international fact-find missions.

The lines of inquiry suggested by the Syrian Arab Republic in connection with this case were also analysed, but no concrete information supporting them was found. I insisted that the IIT work off of leads with different kinds of information. The combination and the consistency of all the information collected as well as corroboration among the various sources help us to reach conclusions.

The challenge for the IIT has not been a lack of information; we got a lot of information. Its real challenge has been the inability to access the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic because its authorities did not allow the IIT in — despite the requests I made and the obligation of the Syrian Arab Republic in accordance with article VIII of the Chemical Weapons Convention and resolution 2118 (2013), which calls for immediate and unfettered access to the territory of Syria.

I would also like to express my consistent position on the reasonable grounds to believe as the basis for the conclusions. This is standard; we did not invent it. It is customary; and it is a very well-known legal term. It means a very strong basis to conclude that chemical weapons have been used.

In connection with the comments related to the BBC podcast in November 2020, a person named “Leon” was being interviewed on the programme. The word “león” in Spanish means “lion” in English.

The OPCW Technical Secretariat does not know this person, and, of course, it did not authorize any staff members to go to the BBC for this programme. If this person is identified, I will naturally open an investigation to find out if there is a breach of the rules of confidentiality. For the time being, what we did is open an internal investigation.

Let me now address progress in Syria’s cooperation, which is a question that has been posed by more than one member of the Council. I have already implicitly responded to this question: no visas, a lack of access to Syrian territory, but what I have to say is that the position of the Director-General is very often very difficult. When asked about cooperation with the Syrian Arab Republic, I will say that all States parties are obliged to implement rules and decisions and that they have to adopt measures in case of non-implementation.

My task is to implement the Convention and to run the Technical Secretariat in the best way possible.

The Director-General is not a judge. I cannot judge the Member States. I cannot judge the work of the Executive Council or the Conference. It is up to Member States to forge their perception of the situation and, if they consider it necessary, take action.

Let me refer also to something that is in the background of the many commentaries, which have been on the whole very positive. I thank Council members very sincerely for that. But what I see is that there is general support for the implementation of the Convention and general support for the work of the Technical Secretariat. However, there are some critics, for example, of the mandate of the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT). The IIT has a mandate that is not recognized by some — very few — Member States.

That those responsible for the use of chemical weapons must be held accountable is a principle that is found in resolutions of the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council, and in many decisions of the Conference of the States Parties, and in countless national statements at the United Nations, at the OPCW and in other bodies.

I want to properly state the following: if I requested hard copies of all the statements of the States Members of the United Nations or the member States of the OPCW declaring that those responsible must be held accountable, my office would be filled with documents. It is a declaration that constitutes the prohibition and is based on universal uncontested doctrine of international law and undisputed customary international law, because the use of chemical weapons can be a war crime, even a crime against humanity.

This principle was of course not established by the OPCW Technical Secretariat. The Technical Secretariat is in charge of implementing States parties' and Council members' decisions, on the basis of international law. And resolution 2118 (2013) clearly states that those responsible for the use of chemical weapons must be held accountable.

On 21 April 1915, the first large-scale chemical-weapons attack took place. It looked horrible. It happened in a little village in the south-west of Belgium called Ypres. On 21 April 2015, a hundred years later, we commemorated the centennial of the attack in Ypres for an entire day. I was invited because I

was already involved in the field of chemical weapons, so I went.

All the Member States — all of them, without exception — agreed with the declaration in which they reaffirmed their condemnation in the strongest possible terms of the use of chemical weapons. They also expressed their strong conviction that those responsible for the use of chemical weapons should be held accountable.

At that time, everyone agreed on this declaration. But now some Member States are opposed to investigating and identifying the origin of those chemical weapons and therefore assigning responsibility for their use; those countries cannot be comfortable with the OPCW Technical Secretariat. Some Council members are perhaps not comfortable with the Technical Secretariat, but we implement the decisions and resolutions of the Council, which have basically the same goals.

The decisions of the Executive Council and the Conference are also in line with this uncontested universal international law doctrine I mentioned, and with resolution 2118 (2013). The OPCW Technical Secretariat is a target of criticism because it is implementing the decision of the Conference of the States Parties of the 27 June 2018, which set up the IIT to investigate the identity of the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons in Syria.

We have no choice, and we do have to understand that. My legal obligation is to implement what the Member States decide, and all of us in the Technical Secretariat work in a modest, dedicated, professional way because we feel a moral, professional and above all legal responsibility to do so.

Not long ago, in the Security Council, Mr. Geir Pedersen, on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the start of the war, said,

“The Syrian tragedy will go down as one of the darkest chapters in recent history, with the Syrian people as among the greatest victims of this century... [I]n the face of the unimaginable violence and indignities[,] ... [t]hey have endured the unspeakable horrors of chemical weapons” (S/2021/265, annex I).

This was said in the Security Council on 15 March 2021. As I said, I cannot judge. I must not judge the decisions or the task of the Member States, but thinking

about its limitations, I have to say that I have difficulties understanding the system.

In conclusion, because the OPCW Technical Secretariat has been recently — and unfairly, I have to say — criticized, I want to underline that, at its twenty-fifth session, in April 2020, the Conference of the State Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention, in its decision entitled “Addressing the possession and use of chemical weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic”, expressed its full support and appreciation for the professional, impartial independent work of the Director-General and the OPCW Technical Secretariat.

In addition, last July, in the twenty-first preambular paragraph of decision C-25/DEC.9, entitled “Addressing the possession and use of chemical weapons by the Syrian Republic”, the Executive Council said:

“Expressing its full support and appreciation for the professional, impartial, and independent work of the Director-General and the Secretariat”.

In recent years, we have seen the re-emergence of chemical weapons in several places. The Technical Secretariat has tackled those new challenges with determination, commitment, independence, expertise and with the will to serve Member States and the international community.

Since I started work at the OPCW at the end of July 2018, I saw in the organization a group of dedicated, honest and professional people who support me in an incredible way with very high professional standards. But, of course, I want to make it clear that, if someone breaks the rules, I will react and I will take action.

I will also respond to the question with regard to the materials supplied by the Syrian authorities. We were receiving a lot of materials. We received a great deal of information from the Syrian authorities. But I want to tell the Council precisely how much. Regarding the information supplied by Syria, in the past five years we received, and I think that the High Representatives received the same or something very similar, 197 notes verbales from the Syrian permanent representation in The Hague related to alleged chemical weapons activities in terms of storage, movements, intent of use or staging, with no details or no supporting documentation that could be verified independently. I can assure Council members that the Technical Secretariat has been examining and analysing in depth everything that we have received from the Syrian Arab

Republic through the permanent representation of Syria here in The Hague. But it has not been possible to link that information to any real origin of use of chemical weapons or to any of the investigations that we are carrying out.

Regarding the accusation of use by terrorists in Syria, I said that in my opening statement. One of my main concerns is that it could be in favour of terrorists, who can cause a great deal of harm with very small amounts of extremely dangerous substances. We are working to investigate, safeguard the knowledge and have the means to deal with that threat, assisting and protecting Member States.

The Centre for Chemistry and Technology shown here will be a fantastic tool for research, investigation, international cooperation, which is highly demanded by the vast majority of member States, training, expertise and skills. We have been making serious efforts all together in the Technical Secretariat to progress in this project. We have the trust and confidence of member States, and the proof is that, despite the fact that we have a budget with zero nominal growth, in approximately 18 months we received voluntary contributions to the tune of more than €34 million euros to build the Centre. We respond to that trust and to that rapport with concrete results. I can say that we are on schedule and are respecting the budget in the construction of the Centre. We are not delayed. The construction will start this month, in June. We have one of the top companies in the Netherlands for the construction. If everything goes as it has so far thanks to the Board that we have here in the organization, chaired by the Deputy Director-General and our experts under my supervision, member States will have a fantastic tool for different activities with the programmes that we are preparing.

I think that I have responded to the questions posed. It remains only for me to again thank you, Mr. President, for your invitation and your kind words.

The President: I thank Mr. Arias for the clarifications he has provided.

The representative of the Russian Federation has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation): I will switch to English for clarity and straightforwardness. It is good that we engaged in a dialogue with the Director-General. It looks as if the Director-General came to this

meeting prepared to speak, or rather he was prepared to speak.

Today we heard from some of our colleagues that we should separate the facts from the noise, that there are some allegations or accusations that are not based on facts. To that I may say that, unfortunately, some of our colleagues prefer to turn a blind eye to the facts that we provide, substituting them with convenient conclusions. It seems as if, when we speak, providing scientific facts, they switch off and do not listen to us.

The Director-General said that the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) has no alternative but to investigate and, he added, identify. I will not comment on the second one, but I will with regard to investigate — investigate with the tools that it has, such as the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission in Syria. We also would like to investigate. The problem is that we do not accept the methods that the OPCW employs to investigate because they contradict the Chemical Weapons Convention.

The Director-General spoke a great deal today. Frankly, we did not hear anything from him that he had not said before. The recent narrative of the Technical Secretariat continues. We again heard claims that those inspectors, in particular Inspector A, was not in any way involved in the Douma investigation. That contradicts the facts that we provided and the documents that we showed. We saw that inspector among us on at least two occasions. He was among us at the Arria Formula meeting that we organized in January, as well as some time later in April. I do not think that any of the Council members who listened to him — and he was very reserved in his comments — doubt his integrity, the facts that he provided or the information that he provided about himself and his role at the OPCW.

Many questions remain unanswered. The Director-General spoke a lot today. We reserve the right to deliberately and meticulously answer or comment on all those issues mentioned today. I will refer to only a few things.

The Director-General said that the bulk of the investigations came after the inspectors left and that it was done when the final report was prepared. That contradicts the facts, which say that the interim report was produced first, from 3 to 22 May 2018. Thirty-one samples were analysed, which is 70 per cent of all the samples that were analysed. Five wood samples were analysed. That is 100 per cent of the wood samples.

Eleven biological samples were analysed during that period, which is 100 per cent. So there is a clear gap, an inconsistency and discrepancy in what the Director-General was telling us today. Allow me to finish.

I was frankly surprised when the Director-General said that he was surprised to see that Syria was not cooperating with the Investigation and Identification Team. That is not surprising at all. Syria has never recognized the legitimacy of the group. Neither have we. That group was established illegitimately, and Syria cannot be expected to cooperate with it. I think that Syria made that very clear from the very beginning. But I was surprised, personally, when the Director-General referred to the Pinheiro Commission — the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic — as an ultimate authority on gathering evidence and testimony on alleged chemical weapons use in Syria. I wonder where the Commission draws its expertise and authority from to issue judgments on this if we doubt or challenge the outcomes and the conclusions of the body that is designed to deal with this issue, namely, the OPCW Technical Secretariat.

Mr. Arias referred to how the inspectors went to Douma. I want to remind everybody, just for the sake of reminding, about a document that we distributed in the Security Council, on 25 May, recalling how, in fact, inspectors went to Douma and how they were prevented from doing so. But before they were prevented from going to Douma at the right time, on 10 April, our Western partners rejected our draft Security Council resolution, providing for unimpeded access for chemical expert members of the mission to any location where an alleged chemical accident took place. That draft resolution was blocked. On 12 April, these experts were in Damascus waiting to go to Douma, but they were prevented from doing so from Headquarters by the three well-known permanent members of the Security Council, citing security reasons, before the strikes of 14 April took place.

The Director-General today quoted the Russian communication to the OPCW Technical Secretariat under the note verbale. This is a seven-page document with a detailed technical analysis by our experts of the incidents in Douma and their findings. The Director-General choose to quote one phrase of the conclusions that were provided. With the permission of the Council, I will quote the whole part of the conclusions.

“The Russian Federation does not challenge the findings contained in the FFM report regarding the possible presence of molecular chlorine on the cylinders. However, the parameters, characteristics and exterior of the cylinders, as well as the data obtained from the locations of those incidents, are not consistent with the argument that they were dropped from an aircraft. The existing facts more likely indicate that there is a high probability that both cylinders were placed at locations 2 and 4 manually, rather than dropped from an aircraft. Apparently, the factual material contained in the report does not allow us to draw a conclusion as to the use of a toxic chemical as a weapon. On that basis, the Russian Federation insists on the version that there was false evidence and on the staged character of the incident in Douma.”

I think that quotation gives Mr. Arias a true account of what the Russian Federation meant when it sent that communication. By the way, that corroborates the conclusions that those “pariah inspectors”, who the Director-General claims violated the norms, rules and ethics of the OPCW, set down in their interim report.

The Director-General says that he will not engage in a dialogue with some of the Scientific Advisory Board. And by the way, I am not the only person who doubts the conclusions of the reports that the Technical Secretariat produces on the incidents. There are other authoritative people in the world and countries that challenge it, but the Director-General prefers not to notice. If he is not prepared to engage through the Scientific Advisory Board, as he said, we propose that we organize an Arria Formula meeting to which we would invite all those who have doubts about the conclusions that the OPCW reached and we would be happy to invite the Director-General there to defend the position of the OPCW Technical Secretariat, if it is challenged, and to provide facts that will make it clear that he was right and they were wrong.

Again, as I said, this is just a fraction of what we could have said in response to the Director-General’s comments. We thank the Director-General wholeheartedly for being with us today. But I think that my list is incomplete, and we will use the opportunity to provide the Director-General with more comments on what we heard today from him.

The President: I call on Mr. Arias to respond.

Mr. Arias: It has been said that I came to this meeting well-prepared. I came well-prepared because I respect the Security Council and when I come to brief Council members, I consider it to be an extremely important task and I make an effort to prepare my notes and my knowledge in the best possible way, which I think is a very normal thing. Nothing has been said that was not known. I do not know if Council members know everything. Perhaps it is not necessary for the Director-General to come back to the Security Council, but I would come back with my best will and highest interests to transmit to members what I know. If members know everything, that is all the better.

The Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) is not recognized by the Syrian Arab Republic. The IIT was set up by a decision of the Conference of the States Parties. The Conference of the States Parties, according to the Chemical Weapons Convention, must deal with any matter or issue related to the implementation of the Convention.

On the other hand, this decision is in line with what I have commented on extensively previously. All this international doctrine is related to the general will that those who used chemical weapons had to be held accountable. The Conference of the States Parties decided, on 27 June 2018, that the IIT had to be set up of its own authority and in line with Security Council resolutions, and not only resolution 2118 (2013).

Of course, the bulk of the investigations related to Douma came after I arrived at the organization, after July 2018. Out of the more than 100 samples, more than 70 good samples were analysed after the summer of 2018. The bulk of the investigation, the bulk of the information, the bulk of the analyses of all the information that had been gathered came after the two inspectors left.

I do not understand why the Pinheiro Commission — the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic — is contested. The Commission has legitimacy because it was set up by the General Assembly, and it has this authority because it reports to the General Assembly. The Commission reported to the General Assembly in August 2018 what I have already said in connection with Douma referring to helicopters, cylinders, chlorine, apartment buildings and casualties.

The Russian note verbale is published and that is what they have to say. Again, I thank the members of the Security Council, and especially the President and the Russian Permanent Representative. We have to be open. We have to work together in the best spirit that we can for the benefit of the United Nations, the OPCW and, of course, the international community.

The President: Unfortunately, I have to remind all representatives that we went beyond the time limit 10 minutes ago. The rule 37 speakers have not even started to speak, but we will lose interpretation in 20 minutes.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Sabbagh (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to begin, Mr. President, by begging your indulgence in granting me sufficient time, as a relevant party concerned, to address the multiple aspects covered in the briefing by the Director-General and in other statements.

It is unfortunate that the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) has been transformed from a technical organization into an instrument in a geopolitical game led by the United States and its Western allies. The unprecedented decision recently illegitimately taken by the OPCW Conference of the States Parties against Syria is clear evidence of the extent of the manipulation, politicization and pressure exerted by those countries within the organization. My delegation categorically rejects the groundless accusations included in some statements and considers them as mere means of pressure and political blackmail.

The use or threat of use by terrorist organizations of chemical weapons and toxic chemicals in Syria from 2013 until now has posed a real danger to the Syrian people and a serious challenge to the implementation of the non-proliferation regime, as represented by the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). It is reprehensible that the States sponsoring those terrorist organizations worked during the past eight years to divert the attention of the States Members of the United Nations and the States parties to the CWC from confronting this chemical terrorist threat, and simultaneously put pressure on the various international investigation teams to impose their agendas and get them to carry out their activities in violation of the working methods stipulated in the Convention and in the terms of reference document.

This deliberate subversive approach to the rules and principles of the work of the OPCW — followed by some members of the Council — has led to wrong conclusions that undermined the credibility and professionalism of their work and limited the ability of the international community to truly confront this terrorist threat. This behaviour is in stark contrast to those countries' responsibilities in maintaining international peace and security.

In that context, I would like to refer to the important information that we have frequently provided the United Nations and the OPCW regarding the possession and transfer of chemical weapons and toxic chemicals by terrorist organizations to stage incidents of chemical attacks with the aim of accusing the Syrian Arab Army. Dealing seriously with such terrorist threats requires the OPCW and relevant United Nations organs to deal with this information with the utmost care and to coordinate with the relevant Syrian authorities to conduct the necessary investigations. But unfortunately, none of that has happened. The Director-General referred to more than 197 memorandums from Syria about the possession, transfer and attempts to use chemical weapons. However, the Fact-Finding Mission did not carry out investigations into any of that information swiftly or seriously, whereas it would promptly act upon any information contained in open sources or received from suspicious sources about accusations against the Syrian Government.

I would also like to draw the attention of the Security Council to the fact that we recently provided the Secretary-General with information we obtained regarding the incident of terrorist organizations' use of chemical weapons in Khan Al-Assal in 2013 — the Director-General completely forgot that information — that confirmed the involvement of the so-called National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces in that terrorist crime, which claimed the lives of 25 martyrs and injured more than 110 civilians and military personnel. Unfortunately, despite our many demands, that remains without investigation.

Regarding comments made in some statements concerning Syria's initial declaration, I would like to make the following clear.

First, the Declaration Assessment Team is not an investigation team; rather, it was established to assist the Syrian authorities.

Secondly, the holding of consultations between the Declaration Assessment Team and the Syrian National Authority and the dates of the Team's visits to Damascus are subject to arrangements agreed upon between the two sides, in line with the obligations of each party. Therefore, any round of consultations will of course be postponed if a date is not appropriate.

Thirdly, the experts of the Syrian National Authority, during their mutual rounds of consultations, provide the Declaration Assessment Team with many technical explanations that fully support the information announced by Syria. Accordingly, it is unacceptable for anyone to make pre-accusations about issues that are still under discussion.

Fourthly, finding traces of a chemical agent in a test sample is not evidence of prohibited chemical activity. The continuation of technical consultations on such issues requires refraining from prejudgement or jumping to unrealistic conclusions and false perceptions.

In the light of this, we categorically reject the insistence of some to question Syria's initial declaration and its cooperation with the Technical Secretariat and the deliberate disregard of any progress made.

My delegation took note of what was referred to in the Director-General's report on the results of the seventh round of inspections of the two facilities of the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Centre. The report indicated that the inspections found "no substances or activities that are inconsistent with the Syrian Arab Republic's obligations under the Convention" (*S/2021/514, annex, para. 17*). We would have hoped that the report not to ignore the assistance, logistical support and facilitation provided by Syria. Despite that, the Centre is not relevant to the chemical programme.

Concerns about procedural flaws and professional irregularities in the working methods of the Fact-Finding Mission still exist. They raise many questions about the professionalism and credibility of the mission's reports; the latest report on the alleged incident in Douma continues to resonate in various capitals. How can those reports be credible if their sources are suspicious, witnesses are terrorist agents, samples are collected by White Helmets and investigations are carried out remotely? Are these normal methods under the Convention? Does basing ourselves on "reasonable grounds" and "most likely" create credibility?

The Director-General says that 193 States do not question the report. I would like to remind him that I personally, during my numerous statements before the Executive Council, presented many aspects of the flawed methodology, which is far from credible and professional. And Syria has rejected the conclusions of the report.

Accordingly, we face a case of non-compliance by the Technical Secretariat with the parameters governing its work. In that regard, I would like to ask the Director-General again: Why does the Technical Secretariat insist on refusing to listen to the substantive observations and valid inquiries made by Syria, Russia and others, along with eminent persons, specialized experts and prominent academics?

The Director-General mentioned that the Fact-Finding Mission that went to investigate the Douma incident was delayed in Beirut for several days. Could he explain the reasons for the delay? I would like to ask why the team leader — who reached Syria on Saturday, 13 April, and left on the morning of the following day, Sunday, 14 April — did not visit the site of the incident in Douma, while Investigator A went to Douma and carried out the investigation? Accordingly, his observations and report are excluded, whereas the observations of the leader, who did not visit the site, are taken into account.

I would have also liked to ask him why it takes years to issue reports on the investigations into incidents reported by the Syrian Government? We have five or more incidents that have been investigated since 2017 — it is now almost four years without a report having been issued by the Technical Secretariat — while priority is given to reporting on investigations of alleged incidents raised by hostile or suspicious parties. This is a clear indication of a double standard,

In conclusion, I reiterate that Syria has fulfilled its obligations arising from its voluntary accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention in 2013. In an unprecedented and exemplary manner, we have disposed of our stockpiles of these weapons and destroyed our production facilities in record time and under difficult and complex conditions. Syria regrets that its continuous cooperation with the Technical Secretariat of the OPCW has been met only with ingratitude and denial.

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

Mr. Takht Ravanchi (Islamic Republic of Iran): As a major victim in contemporary history of the most systematic use of chemical weapons, Iran once again condemns, in the strongest possible terms, the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere and under any circumstances.

As a staunch advocate of the prohibition of the use of chemical weapons, we share the view that the use of these inhumane weapons must not be tolerated. However, this rule must not be politicized or exploited to mount political pressure against others in order to advance narrow national interests or to pursue certain geopolitical objectives. That is indeed as poisonous as the chemical weapon itself.

While ensuring the prohibition of the use of chemical weapons is a must, we all know well that this will not and cannot happen in isolation. To that end, we need first and foremost to ensure the full, effective and non-discriminatory implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). Moreover, we must uphold and ensure the authority and credibility of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

It is, however, a source of deep concern that, in recent years, Western countries have exploited the CWC and politicized the OPCW's work in order to advance their narrow interests in Syria. This has seriously undermined the Convention, resulted in a deep legitimacy and credibility crisis for the OPCW, sowed the seeds of division among its member States, and challenged the long-standing consensual decision-making tradition in disarmament and non-proliferation forums.

In this process, the OPCW has been forced to use flawed procedures, defective methodologies, fabricated information and an improper and broken chain of custody. Additionally, that process has totally failed to acknowledge the strategic decision of Syria to accede to the Convention, as well as its cooperation in fulfilling its relevant obligations, including by expeditiously presenting its initial declaration and verifiably destroying all its 27 chemical weapons production facilities. Indeed, the OPCW process in Syria is but a clear regression from the very basic norms of impartiality and professionalism. It is also obvious that such a process will definitely lead to erroneous conclusions.

Finally, in the threshold of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the CWC's entry into force and the

OPCW's establishment, we call for enhanced efforts to uphold the authority of the OPCW and the full, effective and non-discriminatory implementation of the CWC and its universality. We stand ready to actively and constructively contribute to such efforts.

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

Mrs. Kocyigit Grba (Turkey): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Council during this month.

I thank the Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), Mr. Fernando Arias, and High Representative Izumi Nakamitsu for their informative briefings. Our further appreciation goes to Director-General Arias for the comprehensive and meticulous responses that he provided to the questions from the Council.

It has been almost eight years since the adoption of resolution 2118 (2013), yet we are still discussing the gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies in the Syrian regime's declaration. The regime's refusal to completely and accurately declare its chemical weapons programme constitutes a serious violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

The ninety-second monthly report of the OPCW Director-General (see S/2021/514) provides yet another record of this alarming situation. Not only is the presence of an undeclared chemical weapons production facility a source of grave concern; it also raises serious doubts about the regime's real intentions. There is no plausible explanation of why the regime still fails to declare the chemical warfare agents produced or weaponized at that site. This is clearly in violation of its obligations.

Moreover, the analysis of the samples collected during the twenty-third round of inspections by the Declaration Assessment Team revealed the existence of a chemical warfare agent previously not declared by the regime. The Declaration Assessment Team's analysis hints at further undeclared production activities by the regime.

Instead of clarifying existing discrepancies and inconsistencies, the regime keeps piling up new items on the long list of outstanding issues regarding its chemical weapons declaration. The regime's defiant behaviour cannot be condoned or tolerated. The Council must enforce the regime's full cooperation with the

OPCW and ensure immediate and complete declaration of its chemical weapons programme.

In response to the Syrian regime's non-compliance with its obligations, the OPCW Executive Council adopted a landmark decision in July 2020, which required the Syrian regime to declare the chemical weapons it used during the Ltamenah attacks in 2017 and the production facilities in which they are developed, as well as the chemical weapons it currently possesses. The Executive Council decision, which Turkey supported, set clear and verifiable parameters for action and required the Syrian regime to return to full compliance with the Convention within 90 days. It also urged the regime to resolve all of the outstanding issues regarding its initial declaration.

Yet, continuing its blatant defiance of its legal obligations, the regime refused to abide by the requirements of this decision, which triggered further measures. Accordingly, the decision, adopted by an overwhelming majority during the second part of the twenty-fifth session of the OPCW Conference of the States Parties, provided a measured response in the face of the Syrian regime's persistent non-compliance with its obligations. Turkey co-sponsored this decision as an important step towards ensuring accountability in Syria.

Establishing truth is of paramount importance to our joint efforts to achieve peace and justice in Syria. Investigations by the Fact-Finding Mission in Syria and the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) on chemical weapons use in Syria are crucial in this regard. The IIT has a unique role to play in identifying the perpetrators of chemical weapons use. We welcome its growing cooperation with 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. In our fight against flagrant impunity, we must employ all possible avenues effectively.

The regime's refusal to grant visas to the IIT is another violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention. This is also a clear attempt to hide the truth. The Syrian

regime has never intended to stop using chemical weapons against its own people. As we all know, the IIT identified that, on 4 February 2018, chlorine was used by the regime air force in an attack against civilians in Saraqib. With this latest IIT report, it has now been proven that the Al-Assad regime is responsible for at least eight chemical-weapon attacks. We strongly condemn the continued use of chemical weapons by the regime.

I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate our full support to the OPCW Technical Secretariat and its investigative bodies. The professionalism, impartiality and expertise of the OPCW is commendable. Targeting the integrity and credibility of the OPCW is unacceptable. Creating an alternate reality and polarization on this file only undermines the global norm against chemical-weapon use and emboldens the perpetrators. The cooperation between the United Nations and the OPCW remains essential for a robust non-proliferation regime. We must all strive to enhance that cooperation and stand against attempts to undermine it.

I would like to conclude by reiterating our strong condemnation of the repeated and well-documented chemical attacks by the Al-Assad regime against its own population. The regime's violation of international law and its crimes against humanity cannot go unanswered. Ending impunity is a pressing task for the international community, particularly the Security Council. That is the only way to honour the victims of chemical-weapon attacks and achieve peace in Syria. The Council must be unified in urging the regime to provide swift and tangible cooperation with the OPCW without further delay. This is also key to preventing the recurrence of chemical-weapon use in Syria. In that respect, we would like to highlight once again the responsibility of those who have influence over the Syrian regime.

The President: There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

I would like to thank the interpreters and the Secretariat for staying with us a bit overtime.

The meeting rose at 1.35 p.m.