



CONCEPT NOTE

UN SECURITY COUNCIL ARRIA FORMULA MEETING **“RISKS STEMMING FROM THE POLITICIZATION OF THE ACTIVITIES OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS”**

Date: 24 March 2023

Time: 10am – 1pm

Venue: Conference Room 7

Participation: All UN Member States, Permanent Observers, UN entities, civil society organizations and press are invited

The meeting will be held in all UN official languages and webcast on UN WebTV (*subject to non-objection by UNSC Members*).

Background:

In 2022 the Security Council issued the press statement on the 25th Anniversary of Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), where all members of the Security Council recognized the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) as the organization given responsibility by States Parties to ensure the impartial, independent and professional implementation of all provisions of the CWC. However, the recent developments in the work of the OPCW and its Technical Secretariat (TS) demonstrate that, as of now, the Organization experiences difficulties in achieving this objective.

Many countries have repeatedly pointed out the increasingly politicized nature of the work within the OPCW in general. The Organization has long suffered from the attempts of some countries to turn it into a public venue for promoting their political agenda, thus preventing the OPCW from effectively fulfilling its mandate as prescribed by the CWC.

This trend not only seriously undermines the authority of the Organization, but also leads to further deterioration of the global chemical weapons prohibition regime.

One of the most ample examples of this trend relates to the activities of the OPCW Declaration Assessment Team, Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) and so-called “Investigation and Identification Team” (IIT) which was created in violation of Articles VIII and XV of the CWC after the process of elimination of the chemical weapons programme of the Syrian Arab Republic was completed. These structures conduct their investigations while applying flawed methodology in violation of the CWC, disregarding the principle of maintaining the chain of custody, and base their findings on questionable “evidence” from open, unidentified, or obviously biased sources.

For almost a decade Syria has been repeatedly accused by the Western countries of continued use of chemical weapons, despite the confirmation that all the chemicals declared by the Syrian Arab Republic that were removed from its territory in 2014 have been destroyed. The OPCW TS was put under immense pressure by the Western countries in order to support and promote the same narrative, and subdued to it. Its malpractices became evident due to the scandal around the FFM report on the staged Douma incident of 7 April 2018, when several inspectors attempted to publicly raise concerns about the manipulations with its content, but were faced with persecution and punitive actions. The situation has only deteriorated when the Western countries used the findings of the IIT as a pretext to force the unprecedented decision of 25th session of the Conference of States Parties of the OPCW to suspend the rights of Damascus in the Organization, despite the facts of its cooperation with the OPCW TS which continues to this day. Meanwhile, the IIT proceeded with its illegitimate practices, as demonstrated by the publication of its third report in February 2023, which is yet again full of gaps, inconsistencies and politicized judgements.

The valid concerns about the work of the OPCW TS, in particular the FFM and the IIT, remain unresolved. To this day, all calls to ensure in good faith the impartial, independent and professional implementation of the Convention are being neglected and

distorted. As a result, the OPCW TS remains reluctant to undertake any corrective measures to effectively fulfill its mandate and maintain the authority of the Organization.

This situation not only demands further attention, especially in light of the upcoming Fifth Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties to Review the Operation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (The Hague, 15-19 May 2023), but also should be reviewed by the wider UN Membership to determine what measures should be applied to prevent the authority of the OPCW from being further undermined.

Objectives:

The Arria formula meeting is aimed at providing an opportunity for open exchange on the ways to address the issue of diminishing authority of the OPCW due to its increasing politicization and misuse for promoting politically motivated narratives. With the situation regarding the Syrian “chemical file” on the agenda of the OPCW serving as an example of such a trend, Member States are invited to share their views on the ways to address it and to prevent its replication in other international fora.

Speakers’ Focus Areas:

The participants may wish to focus on the following questions.

- How could the credibility of the OPCW TS findings concerning Syria be fully restored in order to uphold the authority of the Organization and to ensure that it continues to fulfill the role entrusted to it by the States Parties?
- What lessons could be learned from the situation of the OPCW being misused and prevented from fulfilling its objectives in impartial and independent manner and in strict accordance with its mandate? How transparency and accountability for the activities of the OPCW could be improved in general? What specific measures could be adopted to allow for addressing legitimate concerns whether a mandate of the OPCW is being properly fulfilled?

– How Member States could ensure that the work of the United Nations and other international organizations remains strictly focused on the issues on their agenda and not being derailed and politicized, further diminishing their authority and preventing us from achieving our common goals?

Program:

Opening remarks:

- **H.E. Mr. Vassily Nebenzia**, Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations.

Panel presentations:

- Civil society briefers and independent experts on non-proliferation (*TBC*).

Discussion:

- Statements by the UN Security Council members and other UN Member States as time permits, Q&A. Interventions are suggested to be limited to 5 minutes.

Closing remarks:

- **H.E. Mr. Vassily Nebenzia**.