



# Security Council

Seventy-eighth year

**9255**<sup>th</sup> meeting

Tuesday, 7 February 2023, 10 a.m.

New York

*Provisional*

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*President:* Mrs. Frazier . . . . . (Malta)

*Members:*

Albania . . . . .	Mr. Hoxha
Brazil . . . . .	Mr. De Almeida Filho
China . . . . .	Mr. Sun Zhiqiang
Ecuador . . . . .	Mr. Pérez Loose
France . . . . .	Mr. De Rivière
Gabon . . . . .	Mr. Biang
Ghana . . . . .	Mr. Agyeman
Japan . . . . .	Mr. Ishikane
Mozambique . . . . .	Mr. Fernandes
Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Nebenzia
Switzerland . . . . .	Mrs. Baeriswyl
United Arab Emirates . . . . .	Ms. Shaheen
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Dame Barbara Woodward
United States of America . . . . .	Ms. Jenkins

## Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Letter dated 27 January 2023 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2023/69)

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.*

### **Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

### **The situation in the Middle East**

#### **Letter dated 27 January 2023 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2023/69)**

**The President:** In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Syrian Arab Republic and Türkiye to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mrs. Izumi Nakamitsu, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs; Mr. Fernando Arias, Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW); and Mr. Santiago Oñate-Laborde, Coordinator of the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team.

The representative of the Russian Federation has asked for the floor.

**Mr. Nebenzia** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We have a point of order. We would like to go on record with our categorical disagreement about the presence at this meeting of the Coordinator of the Investigation and Identification Team of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), Mr. Santiago Oñate-Laborde. We see no grounds for his participation at this meeting, given that the legitimacy of that body is not recognized by a number of members of the Security Council.

In addition, his presence is clearly redundant; we already have two agreed briefers, that is, OPCW Director-General Fernando Arias and Under-Secretary-General Izumi Nakamitsu. As the Head of a specialized international organization, in our opinion, Mr. Arias is duty-bound to possess complete information about its work, including technical details, and bears political responsibility for his briefing to the Council. We expect that that is exactly what he will do today and that he will not shift responsibility onto his subordinates.

We have never received a convincing explanation, either from the presidency or from any of the Western

colleagues who advocated inviting Mr. Oñate-Laborde, as to why the Head of the Investigation and Identification Team, whose status, as far as we understand it, is not part of the OPCW administrative leadership, should be invited as a separate brifer in this Council meeting along with the Head of the OPCW. Does that mean that Mr. Arias himself is not able to answer the questions of Member States and requires cover from an expert? Or is it that, after half a year of ignoring invitations to speak to members of the Security Council, he is now afraid to appear before us alone, even via video link? Certainly, that does not enhance the authority to the OPCW Technical Secretariat.

We also have serious questions about the position taken by the presidency on this issue. Unfortunately, in stark contrast with the practice adopted by the Security Council, which presupposes the search for consensus, the presidency actually openly took the side of a group of Western delegations demanding the invitation of Mr. Oñate-Laborde and ignored the concerns and specific compromise proposals of other members of the Council. Of course, we perfectly understand the purpose behind Western delegations forcing through the participation of Mr. Oñate-Laborde at today's meeting. But we are categorically against turning the Council into a platform for such political games. That has already happened to the OPCW via the determination of certain Western delegations and with the connivance of its leadership. It must not be allowed to happen now to the Security Council.

Of course, we will not engage in discussions with Mr. Oñate-Laborde, ask questions or react to his observations, whether at this meeting or during consultations, and we call on other Council members to adopt a similar principled position on the matter.

**The President:** The representative of France has asked for the floor.

**Mr. De Rivièrè** (France) (*spoke in French*): The Investigation and Identification Team of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) has drawn up a serious and detailed report, the result of a two-year investigation of the chemical-weapon attack in Douma in 2018. We would therefore like Mr. Oñate-Laborde to be invited to comment in detail on the technical contents of the report that he helped to draft, together with Mr. Arias, who supervised the work. We cannot accept that the Investigation Team, made up of experts with a clear and legitimate mandate, should be

reduced to silence. Despite what we just heard from my Russian colleague, there is clear interest in the Security Council in hearing Mr. Oñate-Laborde and giving him an opportunity to respond to questions from Council members. We therefore call on Council members to accept the participation of Mr. Oñate-Laborde to inform our debate as precisely and objectively as possible.

I will conclude by saying that I absolutely support the view of my Russian colleague with regard to the importance of ensuring that the Council invites only qualified individuals with true expertise, and I count on the Russian Federation to adhere to that principle in future.

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

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2023/69, which contains the text of a letter dated 27 January 2023 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council.

I now give the floor to Mrs. Nakamitsu.

**Mrs. Nakamitsu:** Before we begin, please allow me to express my deep sadness about the devastating earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria and to extend my condolences to the families of the victims. Türkiye is where I started my United Nations career in 1989 with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. I visited the areas that are now affected by the earthquakes countless times and witnessed the amazing generosity of the people there. I also visited Syria many times when I was Director of Asia and the Middle East of what was then the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. As we all know, many of the people there were already in dire need of humanitarian aid because of the ongoing conflict. My sincere sympathy goes to them all. The United Nations, as Council members know, is mobilizing to support them with an emergency response, and it is time for all of us to show solidarity and work together in such an extremely difficult situation.

I thank Council members for the opportunity to brief them on the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013), on the elimination of the chemical-weapon programme of the Syrian Arab Republic. It is a pleasure to be joined at this meeting today, albeit virtually, by Mr. Fernando Arias, Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), as well as Mr. Santiago Oñate-Laborde, Coordinator of the

OPCW's Investigation and Identification Team (IIT). I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate my appreciation to Director-General Arias and the OPCW for their 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 those inhumane weapons. Since the Council's last consideration of this matter (see S/PV.9235), and consistent with established practice, the Office for Disarmament Affairs has been in regular contact with its counterparts at the OPCW on activities related to resolution 2118 (2013). In the light of Director-General Arias's participation in this meeting, my statement will be very brief.

The efforts by the OPCW Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) to clarify all outstanding issues regarding the initial declaration and subsequent declarations of the Syrian Arab Republic have not progressed since the Council last met on this matter. Unfortunately, all the efforts by the OPCW Technical Secretariat to organize the next round of consultations between the DAT and the Syrian National Authority are so far still unsuccessful. As Council members were previously informed, the OPCW Technical Secretariat has provided the Syrian Arab Republic with a list of the pending declarations and other documents requested by the DAT since 2019, with the aim of assisting the Syrian Arab Republic in resolving the 20 issues currently outstanding. However, I have been advised that the Technical Secretariat has not yet received the requested information.

In view of that situation, and in pursuit of its ongoing efforts to implement its mandate, a reduced team consisting of some members of the DAT was sent to conduct limited in-country activities in the Syrian Arab Republic from 17 to 22 January. It is my understanding that the team was returning from the mission as of the date of the most recent report and that the mission's outcome will be included in the next DAT report. I note that Director-General Arias may elaborate on the efforts to resolve the outstanding issues related to Syria's initial declaration. I want to take this opportunity to reiterate the support of the United Nations for the integrity, professionalism, impartiality, objectivity and independence of the work of the OPCW.

With regard to the inspections of the Barzah and Jamrayah facilities of the Scientific Studies and Research Centre, I have been advised that the OPCW Technical Secretariat continues to plan the next round of inspections, to be held this year. As Council members

will recall, the OPCW Technical Secretariat requested that the Syrian Arab Republic provide sufficient technical information or explanations that would enable the Technical Secretariat to close the issue related to the detection of a Schedule 2 chemical at the Barzah facilities of the Scientific Studies and Research Centre in November 2018. I regret to inform the Council that the Syrian Arab Republic has yet to provide that information. Mr. Arias may be able to provide Council members with an update on efforts to ensure the timely resolution of that issue.

I have been advised that the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission is still in the process of studying all the available information related to allegations of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic. In the context, I understand that the Fact-Finding Mission was deployed to the Syrian Arab Republic from 6 to 12 November 2022 and is currently preparing upcoming deployments. I look forward to any updates from Director-General Arias on that matter.

On 27 January, the OPCW Technical Secretariat submitted to the OPCW Executive Council and to the Secretary-General a note entitled "Third Report by the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team Pursuant to Paragraph 10 of Decision C-SS-4/DEC.3 'Addressing the Threat from Chemical Weapon Use'". The Secretary-General has shared the report with Council members as document S/2023/81. I am sure that the Director-General and the Coordinator of the IIT will say more about the report's conclusions and will provide an update on when it will be considered by the OPCW Executive Council.

In closing, I would like to reinforce what the Secretary-General has repeatedly stated. There is an urgent need to not only identify but also hold accountable all who would dare to use chemical weapons in violation of international law. Any use of chemical weapons is unacceptable, and the absence of accountability for their use is a threat to international peace and security and a danger to us all. It is my sincere hope that members of the Council will unite on the issue and show leadership in demonstrating that impunity in the use of the chemical weapons will not be tolerated. The Office for Disarmament Affairs stands ready to provide whatever support and assistance it can.

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

I now give the Floor to Mr. Arias.

**Mr. Arias:** On behalf of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and on my own behalf, I would like to convey our deepest condolences to the representatives of Türkiye and Syria on the deadly earthquake that struck both countries yesterday. In this period of grief, our thoughts and prayers here in The Hague are with those who lost loved ones. We wish those who were injured in the disaster a speedy recovery in such difficult circumstances.

I will start with the briefing to the members of the Security Council on the third report of the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT). I very much appreciate the presence of the Under-Secretary-General in the Chamber today and her very good statement. I also thank members of the Council for inviting me to brief them today, together with Ambassador Oñate-Laborde, Coordinator of the Investigation and Identification Team.

This is the fifth time, in less than five years, that I have been provided with an opportunity to brief the Security Council, which demonstrates the interest of the Council on matters of common interest. Every month, the Council meets pursuant to resolution 2118 (2013) to address the Syrian chemical weapons dossier and is briefed by Under-Secretary-General Nakamitsu. At each meeting, the Council is supported in this task by the OPCW and the monthly report we address through the Secretary-General to the President of the Security Council. In addition, Under-Secretary-General Nakamitsu and I have periodic conversations to update her with the latest information.

We will brief the members of the Security Council today on the third report of the Investigation and Identification Team on the chemical-weapons attack that took place in Douma, in the Syrian Arab Republic, on 7 April 2018. On Friday, 27 January, the report was shared in The Hague with the 193 member States of the OPCW and with the Secretary-General, as mandated by the OPCW Conference of the States Parties in its decision of 27 June 2018. Later, the report was also published on the OPCW official website. I believe that everyone here has already had an opportunity to read the findings of the report. Translations in all official languages are being processed, and we will make them available to them in due course.

The Council will recall that, on 27 June 2018, the OPCW Conference of the States Parties decided to mandate the Technical Secretariat to put in place

arrangements to identify the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic. In accordance with the decision, the Investigation and Identification Team was established. The Team began its work in June 2019 and subsequently issued two separate reports, on 8 April 2020 and 12 April 2021, about four different cases. The report before us today is therefore the third report issued by the IIT. It sets out the findings of the investigation that took place over a period of two years, from January 2021 to December 2022. It elaborates on the conclusions reached by the OPCW Technical Secretariat's Fact-Finding Mission, which determined in its report published on the 1 March 2019 that highly concentrated chlorine gas had been used in the Douma incident of 7 April 2018.

Beyond the work of the Fact-Finding Mission, the IIT led its own independent investigations. It reviewed a wide range of information, part of which it received and part of which it directly collected. On the basis of the analyses and studies carried out, the IIT concluded that there are reasonable grounds to believe that, on 7 April 2018, between 7.10 p.m. and 7.40 p.m. local time, at least one helicopter of the Syrian Arab Air Force, departing from Dumayr airbase and operating under the control of the Tiger Forces, dropped two yellow cylinders that hit two residential buildings in a civilian-populated area, killing 43 named individuals and affecting dozens more. Several contradictory scenarios were examined by the IIT against the backdrop of evidence collected and analysed. The evidence not only validated and corroborated the conclusions reached, but also discarded all other scenarios.

The work of the IIT confirmed that highly concentrated chlorine gas coming from one of the two cylinders killed 43 persons in one of the buildings. Some of the individuals who were in the building sought refuge in the basement, thinking that they would be better protected there during what they thought was a conventional air strike at the time. Others, who were aware that the chemical used would be heavier than air and sink to the lower part of the building, tried to reach the upper floors. Both the basement where the chlorine gas expanded, as it is 2.5 times heavier than air, and the upper floors of the building where the cylinder was releasing chlorine gas in high concentration were lethal places to shelter.

The work of the IIT also provides proof that it would have been impossible to stage the attack by manually placing the cylinders, even less so in the middle of the

air strikes that were taking place at the same time. It conclusively demonstrates that craters found on top of the buildings could not be caused by dropping the cylinders from the adjacent buildings, because the highest one is highly is hardly 16 metres higher than those on which the cylinders fell. That difference in height is not sufficient for the cylinders to reach the needed speed to produce the damage that was found on top of the buildings. The IIT found that on the basis of all the information analysed, there are reasonable grounds to believe that at least one helicopter was used, and that it was operated by the Tiger Forces, an elite unit of the Syrian armed forces. The details of the IIT report will be presented by Mr. Santiago Oñate-Laborde, Coordinator of the IIT, following my statement.

The Syrian people have now been suffering from war for about 12 years. Among the war's atrocities, the grim record of the conflict includes chemical weapons. Chemical weapons have been used in the Syrian Arab Republic, both before and after its accession in September 2013 to the Chemical Weapons Convention. Those well-documented and repeated uses took place despite the successful destruction of more than 1,300 metric tons of declared Syrian stockpiles under stringent OPCW verification measures. All 193 States parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention solemnly and voluntarily agreed and committed to excluding completely the possibility of the use of chemical weapons. That has been upheld, as we have seen from the international reactions to the use of chemical weapons at various levels in various organizations, entities and forums. Accountability for the use of chemical weapons has been requested on many occasions at the highest level.

The Security Council has repeatedly called for those responsible for the use of chemical weapons to be held accountable. Council resolutions 2118 (2013), 2209 (2015) and 2235 (2015) all contain that strong message. The Secretary-General has also supported that call in his statements by emphasizing that accountability is an essential part of deterrence in the use of chemical weapons. The General Assembly and the Human Rights Council have both echoed the call that those responsible for the use of chemical weapons must be held accountable. Several international entities have been created to address the alleged crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic as part of the accountability framework. In August 2011, the Human Rights Council created the Independent International Commission

of Inquiry with the purpose of investigating alleged abuses of international human rights in the Syrian Arab Republic. In December 2016, the General Assembly established 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.

The General Assembly has addressed the issue of chemical weapons through its annually adopted resolution on the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention, submitted this year by Poland. General Assembly resolution 77/73, adopted this year, expresses the firm belief that individuals responsible for the use of chemical weapons must be held accountable. It also stresses the importance of the implementation of the decision on 27 June 2018 of the OPCW Conference of the States Parties, which mandated the Technical Secretariat to identify the perpetrators of chemical-weapon use in Syria, creating the IIT. The Conference and the Executive Council of the OPCW have also stated in a number of decisions that those responsible for the use of chemical weapons must be held accountable.

In addition to all of this, countless national statements have been delivered in past years at the OPCW, the United Nations and other international forums expressing the view that those responsible for the use of chemical weapons must be held accountable. There is one common principle underlying those reactions that has never been contested by any State party — the absolute prohibition of the use of chemical weapons and the unanimous and repeated condemnation of any use by anyone under any circumstances, in addition to the belief that the perpetrators must be identified and held accountable.

I would like to point out that every report produced by the Technical Secretariat of the OPCW, including those of the IIT, follows the highest standards and best practices used by international investigative bodies for reaching solid conclusions. That standard consists of a comprehensive and consistent combination and corroboration of all the information and evidence collected as a whole. The IIT's conclusions are based on an overall assessment and a thorough analysis of all the various and numerous pieces of evidence received and collected. It is the corroboration of all those elements — the testimonies of victims and witnesses, medical records, sample collections and extensive

analyses and studies of chemistry, ballistics, military elements, forensic expertise, computer modelling, satellite imagery, remnants of munitions, as well as the authentication of videos and photos, to name a few — which, taken together, have enabled the IIT to reach its conclusions.

I also want to remind the Council that corroborating consists in gathering as much information as possible, analysing all the elements, comparing them with one another and against all scenarios and arriving at incontestable conclusions. All views were considered and put up against the facts. Many relevant units of the Technical Secretariat provided valuable support to the Team in the course of its activities. The IIT report was prepared with strict respect for the independence of the Team's investigation and on a clear need-to-know basis. I can guarantee that the investigations were performed under the sole authority of the IIT Coordinator and that the substantive results were completely respected.

It is worth mentioning that the IIT attaches the utmost importance to the quality of its work, despite the difficult conditions, which have included numerous and sophisticated cyberattacks, a massive spread of disinformation about our work and sometimes even disrespect of some staff members, in addition to the restrictions imposed by the coronavirus disease pandemic, which are very familiar to all of us. Lessons have been learned and continue to be learned. Just as with all the missions of the Technical Secretariat in Syria — the Declaration Assessment Team, the Fact-Finding Mission and others — the Technical Secretariat will continue to ensure that the knowledge, skills and expertise acquired remain embedded in all of its relevant units.

The construction of the OPCW Centre for Chemistry and Technology was just been completed. The building is ready. The Technical Secretariat will use all of the Centre's new capabilities to ensure that knowledge, capacity and skills are kept and developed in the organization for a better implementation of the Convention.

Before I conclude, I wish to recall a few essential points. The IIT is part of the Technical Secretariat of the OPCW and is not a judicial body, special court or tribunal. The IIT does not have the authority to assign individual criminal responsibility. Its mandate, provided by the OPCW Conference of the States Parties, is to establish the facts and identify the perpetrators of the

use of chemical weapons. However, through its work, the OPCW provides the international community with materials and evidence that will assist accountability mechanisms in their task. The States parties to the OPCW and Members of the United Nations have to decide on the next steps.

Since the day I took office as Director-General of the OPCW, in July 2018, I have been making every effort to engage the Syrian Arab Republic to find ways to address and resolve various issues related to its chemical weapons dossier. In relation to the mandate to identify the perpetrators, despite my several attempts to engage the Syrian authorities, the authorities have refused to recognize or engage with the IIT. It should be recalled that all mandates given under the Chemical Weapons Convention and the decisions of the OPCW policymaking organs concerning the Syrian chemical weapons dossier remain binding on all States parties and on the Technical Secretariat.

The report is now in the hands of the Security Council, and it will be up to the United Nations, the OPCW and the international community in general to take further steps or actions — those that members will deem necessary.

I very much appreciate the opportunity to brief the Council. I will now hand over to the Coordinator of the IIT.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Oñate-Laborde.

**Mr. Oñate-Laborde:** I thank the Security Council for this opportunity to present to it some key elements contained in the third report of the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT).

I would like to start by mentioning that the mandate of the IIT is to establish the facts related to perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons by identifying all information that is potentially relevant to the origin of those weapons. It is important to keep in mind, as was mentioned by the Director-General, that the IIT is not a judicial body. It does not have the authority to assign individual criminal responsibility. The IIT also does not have the authority to make final findings of non-compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention. Those two essential activities in the fight against impunity belong to the policymaking organs of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and to judicial entities.

In its third report, the IIT presents its findings on the investigation of one of the many incidents that have taken place in the Syrian Arab Republic related to the use of chemical weapons. We are dealing with the incident that took place in the town of Douma, in the vicinity of Damascus, on 7 April 2018. The incident was investigated and analysed by the IIT in the period between January 2021 and December 2022.

On the basis of all of the information obtained, to which I will refer in a moment, and its analysis, the IIT concludes that there are reasonable grounds to believe that between 7.10 p.m. and 7.40 p.m. on 7 April 2018, during a major military offensive aimed at regaining control of the city of Douma, at least one Mi-8 or Mi-17 helicopter of the Syrian Arab Air Force, departing from the Dumayr airbase and operating under the control of the Tiger Forces, dropped two yellow cylinders, which hit two residential buildings in the central area of the city.

One cylinder hit the rooftop floor of a three-storey residential building, the one referred to in the report as location 2, without fully penetrating the roof. It ruptured and rapidly released toxic gas — chlorine — in very high concentrations, which rapidly dispersed within the building, killing 43 named individuals, among them nine young boys and 10 young girls, and affecting dozens more.

The second cylinder hit the roof of a three-storey residential building, at the time uninhabited, and is the one referred to as location 4 in the report. It broke into the apartment below. The cylinder ruptured only partially and started to slowly release chlorine, mildly affecting those who first arrived at the scene.

The conclusions reached by the IIT are based on the degree of certainty of reasonable grounds to believe, which is the standard of proof consistently adopted by international fact-finding bodies and commissions of inquiry. In particular, the IIT conducted the following activities. It analysed information received from the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM). It requested information from the States parties, including the Syrian Arab Republic, and upon receipt, reviewed that information. It assessed statements previously provided by witnesses and conducted interviews itself with persons of interest. It obtained videos, documents and other materials from various sources. It requested analytical data underlying the FFM report, including data mining for specific chemicals from OPCW-designated laboratories, as

well as new analysis and technical assessments from a number of forensic institutes and specialists. It also requested and analysed satellite imagery, collected information from open sources and consulted with several experts.

In carrying out those activities, the IIT relied on the same methods and procedures it had applied during the investigations described in its previous reports, including with regard to obtaining and securing information, its information and case management systems and the degree of certainty applied to the identification of perpetrators.

As with some previous investigations, the collection of information in respect of the Douma incident involved reaching out to States parties, international and non-governmental organizations and individuals, as well as several internationally reputable forensic institutes, experts and other relevant entities. Since the IIT is not judicially empowered to compel the submission of information and materials, it relied once again on the voluntary cooperation of all States parties.

Regarding the States parties, the IIT expected them to provide access to relevant information and locations, consistent with paragraph 7 of article VII of the Convention — nothing more, nothing less. In the past few months the IIT held several bilateral meetings with States parties and other entities. It reviewed more than 19,000 files, amounting to more than 1.86 terabytes; obtained and assessed statements from 66 witnesses, five of them women; requested and obtained analysis results and additional data for 70 samples related to the investigation; and engaged in consultations with 10 different experts.

Recognizing the role that the information from the Syrian Arab Republic could also play, the IIT engaged in several good-faith attempts to allow the Syrian Arab Republic to discharge its obligations, under paragraph 7 of article VII of the Chemical Weapons Convention and pursuant to Security Council resolution 2118 (2013), to cooperate fully with the OPCW Technical Secretariat by providing information to the IIT. The IIT made extraordinary efforts to allow the authorities of the Syrian Arab Republic to discharge its obligations to cooperate and provide information and any other input it deemed relevant to the IIT's work. The Syrian Arab Republic decided not to reply to the Technical Secretariat's request. Of course, despite the lack of engagement, the IIT did not draw any inferences

from that lack of cooperation for the purposes of its substantive conclusions. The IIT took specific note of positions previously expressed by the Syrian Arab Republic on the incident in Douma, including information submitted in some of its notes verbales to the Technical Secretariat in 2018 in the aftermath of the incident, in 2019 and in 2021. The information presented by the Syrian Arab Republic was therefore considered by the IIT when analysing possible scenarios concerning the use of chemical weapons in Douma on 7 April 2018. That information and its validity are discussed in various sections of the report.

The IIT also took into due consideration the position expressed at several stages by the Russian Federation on the incident in Douma. The information presented by the Russian Federation in notes verbales to the Technical Secretariat and other official communications and statements — for example, to the Security Council, the OPCW Executive Council and the OPCW Conference of States Parties — was also taken into account by the IIT in the course of its investigation. On 28 January 2022, the Technical Secretariat addressed a note verbale to the permanent representation of the Russian Federation to the OPCW, requesting any concrete information that would potentially be relevant in establishing the origin of the chemical weapons used in Douma on 7 April 2018 or useful in identifying the perpetrators, including information related to actors that might have had the capabilities to develop such weapons. On 15 February 2022, the permanent representation of the Russian Federation responded via note verbale to the Technical Secretariat, reiterating its determination that decision C-SS-4/DEC.3 had been adopted *ultra vires* and that paragraph 7 of article VII of the Convention was therefore not applicable to any activities carried out by the Technical Secretariat in connection with the decision. No further elaborations or supporting evidence were provided.

In preparing its investigations, the IIT built up a plan. In that plan, it considered various hypotheses as to how the incident might have occurred before proceeding to develop concrete scenarios based on the information available. There were two scenarios — one was that the incident was staged, and the other was that it involved the use of barrel bombs dropped from above. In order to explore those two scenarios and assess their validity, the IIT considered the views of the Syrian Arab Republic and the Russian Federation, both of which stated that the incident had been staged by terrorist armed groups



with the support of Western States in order to forge accusations against the Syrian army.

In its report, the IIT started by examining the general situation in eastern Ghouta at the time of the incident. Regarding the military activities in Douma in early 2018, and with respect to the offensive referred to as Operation Damascus Steel, the IIT made its assessment based on accounts by witnesses and experts, flight observation data, satellite imagery and open source information, as well as through consultations with several external entities and experts.

According to the information obtained, on 13 February 2018, the Tiger Forces began to arrive in the opposition-controlled enclave of eastern Ghouta, which had been besieged by the Armed Forces of the Syrian Arab Republic since April 2013 in what has been described as one of the longest sieges in modern history. The Tiger Forces' deployment to the area was corroborated through images and videos posted on accounts linked to both the Syrian Arab Army and to the Tiger Forces. On 18 February, Syrian Arab Republic forces, alongside the Tiger Forces and other Syrian and foreign militias supported by Russian Federation forces, launched a full-scale air and ground assault to recapture eastern Ghouta. Aircraft activity originating from Dumayr airbase continued until 23 March, followed by a 10-day lull. The temporary suspension of air operations coincided with negotiations taking place between Jaysh Al-Islam and representatives of the Syrian Arab Republic, mediated by a representative of the Russian Ministry of Defence. Negotiations continued through early April, yielding no results.

Simultaneously, on 28 March, pro-Government media reported that the Syrian forces were mobilizing around Douma and preparing a major assault should the negotiations with the Jaysh Al-Islam fail. As of that day, according to United Nations sources, 70,000 people remained besieged in the enclave.

On 6 April, negotiations between Jaysh Al-Islam and the Russian Federation broke down. Amid reports of shelling on Damascus suburbs from the Jaysh Al-Islam position, intense air strikes on Douma resumed after a 10-day break. On the evening of 7 April, as the barrage of large-scale conventional shelling continued, reports of a chemical attack on two locations in Douma started circulating in the media. Dozens of casualties were reported by medical staff on the ground. The IIT did

not obtain any information indicating that military targets had been placed in proximity to either location.

A few hours after the attack, on the morning of 8 April 2018, Jaysh Al-Islam negotiated its surrender with the Russian mediators. After the attack, Syrian forces, supported by Russian military police, regained control of Douma. The OPCW Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) was then allowed to visit the sites on 21 and 25 April. After the investigation, the FFM was able to determine in its report that there were reasonable grounds that the use of a toxic chemical as a weapon took place on 7 April 2018 in Douma. The FFM further concluded that the toxic chemical contained reactive chlorine and was likely molecular chlorine. The FFM also assessed that it was possible that two yellow industrial cylinders found at the two sites of alleged use were the source of the substances containing reactive chlorine.

The IIT undertook several steps to clarify and deepen its understanding of the findings of the FFM. It must be recalled that, during its visit to the sites, the FFM collected and obtained 49 samples from location 2 and 20 samples from location 4, including dry and wet wipes of surfaces, concrete debris, wood, fabric, plastic material, paint flakes, metal and biomedical samples from victims.

A subset of those samples were sent out for analysis to two OPCW-designated laboratories. Considering the FFM's analytical findings, the IIT focused specifically on the anthropogenic subset of the identified chlorinated organic chemicals — that is to say, on chemicals that are not naturally present in the environment. The fact that there are no natural sources of those chlorinated chemicals means that their presence can be due only to chemical events involving reactive chlorine.

Then, in addition to assessing the analytical data supporting the FFM report, as relating to both locations, the IIT also undertook the analysis of two supplementary samples and electrical copper wire from location 2 and a piece of concrete collected by a third party at location 2 in Douma, on 8 April. For that item, the IIT was able to reconstruct the chain of custody between the date it was collected and the date it was first received and analysed by an OPCW-designated lab.

In the light of the analytical results obtained and presented in detail in the report, the IIT has reasonable grounds to believe that chlorine gas was used at both relevant locations in Douma and that the cylinders were

the origin of the chlorine gas released at both locations. For both occasions, the assessment of the analytical data of 17 samples reveals the presence of chlorine-gas markers, whose formation and specific position at both sites can be explained solely by the release of a high concentration of chlorine gas from the cylinders. Those allow the IIT to rule out the hypothesis that the incident may have been staged using household bleach products or pesticides or that no chemical event may have taken place at all.

At the two sites, identical chemical fingerprints were identified in conifer wood present in the basement of location 2 and at the base of location 4 as a result of exposure to chlorine gas. Additionally, the staging scenario finds no support in the chemical data, considered in its totality, nor in the pattern of how the relative levels of the chlorinated chemicals are distributed. It would have been extremely difficult, if not impossible, to mimic the spread of gas such as chlorine gas. Laborious staging operations would have had to be performed, according to a detailed plan, in order to produce the exact concentration gradient and pattern observed in the results at two different locations. Moreover, all that would have had to be done in the middle of combat. The IIT was therefore not able to identify any evidence, including from open-source information or from the Syrian Arab Republic or other State parties that would corroborate that any of the staging actions were performed at either location.

In its analysis, the IIT also considered in detail the symptoms of the affected persons. The IIT consulted several specialists and requested an independent toxicologist not involved in previous assessments of the incident to make their own evaluation of the reported symptoms. The IIT provided the expert with anonymized accounts and data from 55 individuals interviewed by either the FFM or the IIT, including affected persons and others who were present at the scene or otherwise involved in the rescue operations in the hours after the incident.

Furthermore, while the symptoms of the victims are consistent with chlorine exposure, the IIT considered it useful to assess possible chlorine-gas dispersion from the cylinder found at location 2, the one on the rooftop, where most fatalities were reported. The IIT obtained and reviewed two sets of data and visual representations of the gas-dispersion modelling independently elaborated based on several parameters, including locations of the crater, prevailing weather

conditions, as well as variations in the filling capacity of the cylinder and of the dispersion rate of the gas.

The two independent gas dispersion models considered by the IIT indicate that the accounts of the witnesses on the rapidity at which the symptoms began are indeed reliable, and that those persons were affected by chlorine gas used as a weapon in particular. Those who died in the building at location 2 did so because of exposure to the chlorine gas released rapidly from the rooftop. The IIT further assessed that several of the fatalities were exposed to chlorine while seeking to escape from the shelter in the basement to upper floors.

At location 4, the absence of severe symptoms and fatalities, compared to those at location 2 and in the surrounding area, can be explained by the fact that the relevant building was not inhabited at the time, and that the bulb of the cylinder found at location 4 did not rupture, unlike the one at location 2.

I rely on my report, which was distributed to the Security Council. I am sure that those who are interested will find in it the answers to what happened.

I would like to conclude by thanking you, Madam President, and those who were willing to listen to this report. Finally, I would say that the IIT must once again conclude that the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic is the responsibility solely of the armed forces of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Finally, I wish to express my most sincere condolences to the victims of the earthquake in the Syrian Arab Republic and in Türkiye.

**The President:** I thank Mr. Oñate-Laborde for his briefing.

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

**Ms. Jenkins** (United States of America): I want to start by expressing my deep sadness for the tragic loss of life in both Türkiye and Syria during this week's devastating earthquakes. In addition to supporting our Turkish allies, the United States is also supporting humanitarian organizations inside Syria. It is not lost on us that many of the Syrian first responders now pulling civilians from the rubble were, just a few years ago, helping civilians who had been burned or suffocated by the Al-Assad regime's chemical weapons. The humanity and bravery of the Syrian first responders is astounding, and we salute them.

I want to thank Under-Secretary-General Nakamitsu, Director-General Arias and Coordinator Oñate-Laborde for their briefings. I also want to express my gratitude to the dedicated staff of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) for so compellingly establishing the facts surrounding the Al-Assad regime's use of chemical weapons in Douma in 2018. Reading this report, one can first and foremost only remember the victims and survivors — men, women and children — of the horrific 7 April 2018 attack on Douma. By extension, we also remember the victims and survivors of the many other chemical attacks perpetrated by the Al-Assad regime. On behalf of the United States, I offer our most sincere condolences to the families of those who lost their lives on that sombre day.

I also want to salute the Syrian and international organizations that responded to those attacks, assisted the victims and collected much of the evidence that made this report possible. As the Director-General briefed, and as the OPCW's Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) made clear in their report, the facts of what occurred on that fateful day are not in dispute. The Al-Assad regime dropped two chlorine gas cylinders on two apartment buildings, killing 43 men, women and children and injuring countless more.

Unfortunately, such findings are not surprising. It is indeed the fifth separate instance of the use of chemical weapons that the IIT has attributed to the Al-Assad regime — all clear violations of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). Those are in addition to the four chemical weapon attacks previously attributed to the Al-Assad regime by the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism.

Let us also not overlook the questions raised by the IIT findings regarding the role of Russian forces in Douma at the time of the attack. The report highlights the fact that Russian forces were co-located at the base from which Al-Assad's helicopters launched their deadly chemical attack and that they controlled the air space over Douma, along with the Syrian Air Force. The United States and others have also long pointed out the extremely troubling role of the Russian forces in the aftermath of the attack, when Syrian and Russian military police denied and delayed the OPCW inspectors' access to the site. In an effort to set up their own staged investigations, they also attempted to sanitize the site and remove incriminating evidence of the use of chemical weapons.

We continue to have serious CWC compliance questions regarding Russia's assistance to the Al-Assad regime with regard to the regime's use of chemical weapons in Douma. The report also puts to rest Russia and Syria's baseless allegations that opposition forces were to blame for the Douma attack. The IIT made clear that it had found that such a fable lacked any shred of credibility. That should come as no surprise to most Council members, who bear witness on a near-daily basis to Russia's blatant disinformation regarding its brutal war of aggression in Ukraine.

As my colleagues have done countless times before me, I am reiterating the call by the United States for accountability for those responsible for the numerous chemical-weapon attacks carried out by the Al-Assad regime, including the one in Douma. We also urge the members of the Council not to overlook the classified annex of the Douma report. It is available to all members of the OPCW, and its findings must also be discussed. The Al-Assad regime must comply with its international obligations and provide OPCW staff immediate and unfettered access so that they can conduct inspections and continue investigating Syria's incomplete accounting for its chemical weapons stockpile. In particular, we remain deeply concerned over the serious efforts to reconstitute its chemical weapons programme. For its part, Russia must stop shielding the Syrian Government from accountability.

There must also be no impunity for the use of chemical weapons, and the United States remains determined in its efforts to seek accountability for the individuals responsible for chemical attacks in Syria. We have already imposed sanctions and visa ineligibilities against more than 300 individuals and entities linked to Syria's chemical-weapons programme, and we will continue to use such tools and others to promote accountability for those responsible for those heinous attacks.

With the Review Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention fast approaching, such findings also strengthen our resolve to work with other responsible nations to strengthen the Chemical Weapons Convention and keep the OPCW fit for purpose.

We also support investigative efforts, such as the United Nations International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM), which is building case files on violations and abuses in Syria, including the use

of chemical weapons. It is sharing the information and evidence that it collects with prosecutors. The IIIM's work has already helped to facilitate convictions of former regime officials in Europe, and we look forward to more investigations and prosecutions, possibly even here in the United States, thanks to the Justice for Victims of War Crimes Act, which President Biden recently signed into law.

I understand that the Security Council may at times have grown a bit weary of the Syrian chemical weapons issue. However, in the light of this most recent report on Syria's blatant disregard for its international obligations under the CWC and resolution 2118 (2013), we are reminded that now is not the time to reduce our oversight of the regime's compliance with Security Council resolutions or to turn a blind eye to the further deterioration of its dismal cooperation with the OPCW. The serious blatant disregard for its obligations is an affront to the Council and the international order. The heinous acts documented in the OPCW's report and the Syrian regime's brazen attempts to deny and deflect responsibility once again show why the United States is not normalizing relations with the Al-Assad regime. We therefore strongly urge any country engaging with the Syrian regime to consider the regime's atrocious human rights record over the past 12 years and the violations the OPCW has documented in Douma and elsewhere.

**Mr. Nebenzia** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): First of all, we would like to start by expressing our condolences to the families of the victims affected by the horrific earthquakes yesterday in Türkiye and Syria, whose representatives are at today's meeting.

We have recently had many completely empty meetings on the Syrian chemical dossier, and their uselessness is obvious to everyone. That is why we and many other Council members have called, and are calling, for the streamlining of our scheduled discussions on this topic. Our Western colleagues all along have stubbornly blocked any attempts by sensible Council members to use our common time more productively. It may well be that the new report of the illegitimate Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) on the incident on 7 April 2018 in Douma, Syria, the issuance of which was announced in the fall, was intended, in accordance with Western expectations, to make the case that the Council has something to discuss on the Syrian dossier. But today's meeting and the briefings that we heard were empty. For more than

an hour, we heard the same things being repeated over and over.

If we have anything to discuss today, it is the decline of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Technical Secretariat, which instead of being a respected and impartial international entity designed to facilitate compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention by the States parties has become an impotent tool in the hands of the collective Western States, covering up outrageous fraud and violations of the Convention. The current Director-General of the OPCW, Fernando Arias, who has finally magnanimously deigned to address the Security Council today, bears considerable responsibility for that. We will use this opportunity and ask him specific questions that he has consistently avoided answering.

I will not comment on the activities of the IIT today. For us, that entity does not exist because its establishment was pushed through the Executive Council of the OPCW in violation of the principle of consensus and article XV of the Chemical Weapons Convention. We have repeatedly stated that we reject in advance any products that have already been issued, or will be issued, by the IIT. Its destructive and politicized activities have nothing to do with the principles of impartiality and objectivity. The IIT, by definition, cannot produce anything worthwhile unless the original sin in the methodology of the OPCW Technical Secretariat, including the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission (FFM), which fabricated and forged its report on the Douma incident for the benefit of Western countries, is corrected. As with the FFM report, the IIT product ignores scientific, logical and causal connections. We are not going to engage in a detailed discussion of that opus — our attitude towards it was already made clear in the statement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation on 30 January and in a joint statement by the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation and the Syrian Arab Republic on 6 February.

In my statement I would like to recall the incident in Douma, which has become something of a vial for the Security Council, like the one former Secretary of State Colin Powell waved in this Chamber about 20 years ago (see S/PV.4701). On 7 April 2018, the infamous White Helmets non-governmental organizations reported an alleged incident in Douma, Syria, in which allegedly as a result of dropped chlorine cylinders, several dozen people had died and the wounded had been transported

to a nearby hospital. Very few people recall that, on 10 April, Damascus officially sent an invitation to the OPCW to send inspectors to Douma. Those inspectors were in Damascus and continued to delay their departure for Douma. That we prevented their visit to Douma, as was just stated by the representative of the United States, is an outrageous lie.

On 14 April 2018, the United States, the United Kingdom and France launched a massive missile strike against Syrian civilian and military targets as punishment for the Douma incident. In other words, Paris, London, and Washington, without waiting for any investigation, identified and punished the guilty party themselves. If they had been interested in determining the truth, they would not have struck Syria in violation of the norms and principles of international law, which could have destroyed important evidence.

At the same time, the Western media continued its propaganda campaign blaming Damascus for the incident. The OPCW came under pressure, which resulted in the fabricated FFM report. It was fabricated because its original version did not contain any conclusions about the culpability of Damascus. We have repeatedly asked Mr. Arias to comment on that, but we have not received any clear answers either during our meetings or in closed consultations or in any other format. I will remind Mr. Arias of our questions.

First, we would like to know, on what grounds are the IIT and the FFM violating the fundamental principle of the chain of custody? What motivates Mr. Arias to sign documents whose conclusions are based on information received from a third party, such as the White Helmets, who make no secret of their bias? Have the working principles of the Technical Secretariat changed? Are the provisions of the Convention on the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons no longer its guiding principles? I would like to recall that the United Nations Mission to Investigate Allegations of the Use of Chemical Weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic stated clearly in its 2013 report (see S/2013/553) that,

“the independent verification of information on the use of chemical weapons is not possible in the absence of data on their means of delivery and of biometric samples collected and analysed in accordance with the principles of chain of custody.”

Now the organization freely uses information from open sources and third parties. Evidence of an incident can apparently be sent to the OPCW by mail and

anonymously, because if it fits the right narrative, it will be considered “reasonable grounds” for drawing conclusions.

We would still like to hear from Mr. Arias clear answers about the outrageous scandal that occurred during the preparation of the FFM report on the Douma incident, the final version of which was basically rewritten under pressure from Western countries, in particular with regard to chemical, toxicological and ballistic tests and witness testimony. The inspectors who disagreed with such a blatant forgery, which directly undermines the principles of the organization, were, with his permission, removed and persecuted and became victims of genuine harassment. Why has he still not taken any action to address that situation? Even his predecessor, Mr. Bustani, expressed the need for an investigation in that regard.

Furthermore, as far as we can tell, the main inconsistencies in the FFM’s report have been directly incorporated into the new IIT report, which also has new inconsistencies. After all, lies beget lies, and Mr. Arias is condoning them. According to the current version of the event, the victims seem to have rushed to the area with the highest concentration of toxic chemicals, even though people usually try to flee a contaminated area. No mention is made of the fact that none of the residents of the affected building identified the people who had allegedly died of chlorine poisoning as their neighbours, or of the testimony of numerous witnesses that the bodies of the victims had been transported from nearby areas ahead of time and were found to have bullet and explosion wounds rather than signs of chlorine intoxication.

The scandal surrounding the White Helmets is also being ignored because the staged version of events is not being disputed.

The interpretation of what happened simply does not correspond to elementary laws of physics. In some incomprehensible way, a 100-kilogramme cylinder broke through the roof and ricocheted off a bed without damaging the building. In the area of the breach in the roof, there were no traces of the steel reinforcements that would have had to be sticking out after such a heavy blow. No signs of damage were found on one of the cylinders, despite the fact that it had allegedly been dropped from the air. And the causal relationships have been upended too. How, for example, could the IIT have analysed the remnants of the cylinders

used in the so-called chemical attack if both had been destroyed by an Israeli air strike on the Syrian airbase? The actual explanation of what transpired is that the chlorine cylinders were simply brought into a residential building by representatives of the notorious White Helmets to stage the incident. That was ignored, despite the evidence for it, such as traces of distinctive paint in the building lobby from where the cylinders were carried up.

Nevertheless, Mr. Arias, as the head of an important international organization, which must observe the principle of impartiality and neutrality, not only voluntarily signed the IIT report but also commented on its release with the words, “The world now knows the facts. It is up to the international community to take action at the OPCW and beyond”. Does that mean that he is deliberately ignoring the information provided by us and other countries to the OPCW, and is openly siding with the Western countries that sponsored the White Helmets and continue to advance their own anti-Syrian agenda? Is he able to disclose the sources of the information on which the IIT report is concocted? Given the way in which its insinuations have been rapidly picked up by the United States, Britain, France and Germany, which were also quick to dump out yet another load of anti-Russian accusations in a joint statement by their foreign affairs departments, there can be no doubt as to the politicization of the document.

We are hoping that Mr. Arias will answer our questions here at this meeting in the Chamber, without attempting to limit the discussion to closed consultations. We have nothing to hide, and he should have no secrets from members of the Security Council or from the States parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention. Furthermore, we expect that in future he will find the time to appear before the Security Council when it considers it necessary to invite him.

**Mr. De Rivièrè** (France) (*spoke in French*): First of all, let me express my condolences to the bereaved families in the wake of the devastating double earthquake that hit southern Türkiye and north-western Syria yesterday. I thank Mrs. Nakamitsu, Mr. Arias and Mr. Oñate-Laborde for their briefings.

France has taken note of the third report issued on 27 January by the Investigation and Identification Team of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). Its conclusions are damning. The Syrian regime was responsible for the chemical-weapon

attack carried out in Douma on 7 April 2018. The detailed and well-documented report marks the ninth case of the use of chemical weapons attributed to the regime by independent United Nations and OPCW mechanisms. The report details how the Tiger Forces of the Syrian Arab Air Force took off from Dumayr airbase and deliberately dropped two barrels of chlorine on residential buildings on the city centre, killing 43 people and affecting dozens more. France firmly condemns that act, which constitutes a war crime and a crime against humanity. We once again urge the Syrian regime to comply immediately with its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention. Almost 10 years after the unanimous adoption of resolution 2118 (2013), the regime must finally shed light on its existing stockpiles, because as we all know, they have not all been destroyed. It must allow OPCW personnel to deploy to Syria as soon as possible.

There is credible information in the report, corroborated by multiple sources, that Russian forces were stationed at Dumayr airbase, together with the Tiger Forces, while the airspace over Douma was exclusively controlled by the Syrian army and Russian air defence forces. I say this very firmly — Russia must stop covering for the Syrian regime. As early as the day after the attack, Russian military police helped the regime bar the OPCW from having access to the site. It attempted to clean up the site of the attack. In the aftermath, Russian and Syrian troops posted photographs of staged scenes online to support fabricated accounts of the incident. No one was fooled. The attack was not staged by the opposition or by armed groups, as some would have us believe. No amount of disinformation can hide the guilt of the regime and its allies.

Let me conclude by commending the independent, impartial and professional work of the OPCW. It is essential to expose the truth if we are to hold the perpetrators of those attacks accountable. There must be no impunity for war criminals. The fight against impunity is a priority for France and the foundation of the effectiveness and credibility of the prohibition regime. France will continue to work with its partners to that end.

**Dame Barbara Woodward** (United Kingdom): On behalf of the United Kingdom, I express our condolences to the people affected by the earthquake in Türkiye and Syria. Our thoughts are with the families still searching for answers and loved ones from the rubble,

those in mourning in the aftermath and aftershocks of the earthquake and those helping them in any way. The United Kingdom is contributing immediate support and stands ready to support further humanitarian efforts.

I would like to start by thanking High Representative Nakamitsu, Director-General Arias and the Coordinator of the Investigation and Identification Team of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), Mr. Oñate-Laborde, for their briefings. We welcome the publication of the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team's latest report, which has decisively found the Al-Assad regime responsible for the 2018 chemical-weapon attack on Douma, which killed 43 men, women and children and injured dozens more in horrifying circumstances. We are faced yet again with undeniable evidence that the Syrian State has used chemical weapons to murder its own citizens. This is the ninth such finding of the Syrian regime's responsibility for chemical-weapon attacks in investigations by the United Nations and OPCW. We welcome the report and once again commend the expertise, independence, dedication and professionalism of the OPCW staff. We owe it to the victims of Douma and the thousands of other victims of chemical-weapon attacks across Syria to hold the Syrian regime to account.

Moreover, today we are gravely concerned about the possibility that the Al-Assad regime has been working actively to rebuild its chemical-weapon stockpile since at least 2018, in flagrant violation of its obligations and the commitments that 193 States parties have made under the Chemical Weapons Convention in pursuit of a world free from chemical weapons. That is why it remains vital that we support the OPCW in efforts to resolve inconsistencies and discrepancies with Syria's chemical-weapon declaration. The Syrian regime must now change its behaviour on chemical weapons and provide the Security Council with concrete and credible assurance that it has destroyed all stockpiles and no longer possesses the capability or intent to use chemical weapons anywhere, under any circumstances. Despite the latest overwhelming evidence of Syria's chemical weapons use, we have heard again today Russia's usual barrage of lies, denials, disinformation and unfounded criticism of the OPCW. But the OPCW's painstaking report, which considers the alternative scenarios put forward by Russia, specifically, comprehensively and credibly rejects them on the basis of evidence.

If the Al-Assad regime and its protector, Russia, prevent progress, block accountability and deny justice

for the victims, they also risk the further erosion of the global norm against those abhorrent weapons. All of us here today have a responsibility to support the OPCW to uphold the Chemical Weapons Convention, insist on compliance with the resolutions of the Council and continue to seek accountability for the victims of those heinous attacks.

**Ms. Shaheen** (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mrs. Izumi Nakamitsu and Mr. Fernando Arias for their briefings today. We welcome the participation of Mr. Arias in this meeting. We also listened to the thorough report by Mr. Santiago Oñate Laborde.

Before addressing the subject of today's meeting, I would like to express our sincere condolences to the representatives of Syria and Türkiye, who are with us today, as well as to the families of the victims of the devastating earthquake that hit the two countries. The United Arab Emirates stresses its continued commitment to providing the relief support needed during this difficult time.

I would like to reaffirm the steadfast position of the United Arab Emirates that explicitly rejects and condemns the use of chemical weapons under any circumstances, by anyone and anywhere. Their use constitutes a flagrant violation of the provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and international law.

In the context of today's discussion on Syria's chemical dossier, my country would like to note the following.

First, we reiterate the need to address the gaps and pending issues between the Syrian authorities and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and to keep that matter at the centre of our discussions on Syria's chemical dossier. In that context, we welcome the visit undertaken by a reduced team from the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) to Syria last month and emphasize the importance of hearing the outcome of that visit at the next Council's meeting on the matter.

Secondly, the United Arab Emirates values the role of the OPCW in ensuring the implementation of the CWC, including the investigation of incidents that involve the alleged use of chemical weapons. We stress the technical nature of the OPCW's mandate and the importance of it remaining an independent organization,

separate from various political developments, in order to achieve the objectives and purposes of the CWC. We emphasize the importance of the investigations following a rigorous and systematic approach so that their findings do not leave any room for doubt or uncertainty. Any allegation of potential use of chemical weapons must be taken with the utmost seriousness. In that context, we refer to the report issued by the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) about the Douma incident in 2018, which raises further questions and inquiries.

Thirdly, my country calls for further investigations into the development and use of chemical and biological weapons by the Da'esh terrorist organization in Syria and Iraq. We commend the investigative efforts in that regard by the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant to ensure that Da'esh is held accountable for its terrorist crimes.

In conclusion, we stress the importance of achieving tangible progress on the chemical dossier, and we reiterate that the ultimate goal of banning chemical weapons is to protect humankind from their horrific effects.

**Mr. Ishikane** (Japan): I would like to reiterate our heartfelt condolences to those who lost their lives and their families in the recent devastating earthquake in Türkiye and Syria. I sincerely pray for the prompt reconstruction of the affected areas, and Japan has started — and will continue — to extend its support.

I would first like to thank Mrs. Nakamitsu, Mr. Arias and Mr. Oñate-Laborde for their comprehensive and insightful briefings.

The use of chemical weapons can never be tolerated anywhere, by anyone, under any circumstances. Their use in Syria is a flagrant breach of international law, including the Chemical Weapons Convention, and constitutes a threat to international peace and security and the non-proliferation regime.

In April 2018, 43 individuals, including women and children, lost their lives, and dozens more were affected in the horrific chemical weapons attack in Douma, according to the findings of the Fact-Finding Mission and the Identification and Investigation Team (IIT). The latest report of the IIT concluded that there are reasonable grounds to believe that the Syrian Arab Air Force perpetrated those attacks. Japan condemns

the Government of Syria's use of chemical weapons, as concluded by the report. We deeply regret that the report has once again confirmed the Government of Syria's continued failure to cooperate with the OPCW and the IIT, violating its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention and resolution 2118 (2013).

The decision made by the twenty-fifth session of the Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention should be taken seriously by Syria. Syria must engage in good faith with the OPCW Technical Secretariat and provide all the required documents in order to resolve the outstanding issues related to the initial and subsequent declarations submitted by Syria. It is imperative that Syria immediately declare and completely eliminate its chemical weapons programme and grant full and unhindered access to OPCW staff to verify compliance. In addition, it is our shared responsibility to hold accountable those who have used chemical weapons and to bring justice to the victims. No Member State should provide shelter to those responsible for committing such brutal and inhumane acts against their own people.

We commend the professional, impartial and independent work conducted by the OPCW and its staff. We strongly oppose any attempts to undermine their invaluable work. Furthermore, in order to prevent the recurrence of the use of chemical weapons in Syria, Japan continues to fully support the efforts of the OPCW, including the IIT, and to work closely with the international community toward a settlement of the Syrian crisis.

**Mr. Pérez Loose** (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to begin by expressing our condolences to the Governments of Türkiye and the Syrian Arab Republic following the large-scale earthquakes that occurred on 6 February. We express our solidarity with all the families of the victims.

I would like to thank the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Mrs. Izumi Nakamitsu; the Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), Ambassador Fernando Arias; and the Coordinator of the Investigation and Identification Team, Ambassador Santiago Oñate-Laborde, for their informative briefings.

The report of the OPCW issued on 24 January, presented in line with paragraph 12 of resolution 2118 (2013), holds particular importance for Ecuador as an elected member of the Security Council. It is



also important for us to maintain open dialogue and consultations in which we can count on the presence of those in charge of the mechanisms and organizations that contribute to the deliberations of the Council. Our country's position on the issue is as follows.

First, we deplore the lack of cooperation and commitment on the part of the Syrian authorities with respect to their responsibilities under the Chemical Weapons Convention and resolution 2118 (2013), for which September will mark 10 years since its adoption. It is unacceptable that, more than nine years after the Syrian Arab Republic acceded to the Convention, its national declaration still cannot be considered accurate and complete, despite the efforts of the Technical Secretariat, through the Declaration Assessment Team, dating back to 2019.

Secondly, since February 2021, the Security Council has been awaiting the organization of a fresh round of consultations between the Declaration Assessment Team and the Syrian National Authority, as well as a meeting between the Director-General and the authorities of the Syrian Arab Republic, which was proposed by the OPCW in June 2021. Based on its report, we know that a streamlined team conducted a visit from 17 to 22 January to carry out limited activities in the country. We hope that that will be the first step towards effective cooperation, and we request, at the earliest, information on the development of such cooperation.

Thirdly, it is alarming to learn of the conclusions of the third report of the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team, which states that there are sufficient grounds to point to the Syrian Arab Air Force as the perpetrator of the chemical attack that took place in the city of Douma on 7 April 2018. It is hoped that investigations will continue. Ecuador reiterates its absolute condemnation of that horrific event and its overall condemnation of the development, possession and the use of chemical weapons by whomever, wherever and under any circumstances. The Council cannot allow such criminals to go unpunished.

Lastly, as we recognize the work of the OPCW and the integrity, professionalism, impartiality, objectivity and independence of its technical teams, Ecuador once again strongly urges the Syrian authorities to demonstrate their willingness to ensure the full and effective implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention and all relevant resolutions of the Security Council.

**Mrs. Baeriswyl** (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): First of all, allow me to join my colleagues in once again extending our deepest condolences to the families of the thousands of victims of the earthquake that struck Türkiye and Syria. The disaster of a magnitude not seen in decades adds to the already serious humanitarian crises affecting the region. Switzerland stands with the victims and their families. We hope that the maximum number of people will be rescued in the coming hours.

On 7 April 2018, other very grave events claimed innocent Syrian victims in Douma, on the outskirts of Damascus. On that day, 43 civilians — seven men, 17 women, nine boys and 10 girls — died as a result of a chlorine gas attack. We know from the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) that it was not an accident, but a deliberate attack using chemical weapons, which are prohibited by international law.

Over the past 10 years, there have been repeated violations of obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention in Syria. The third report of the Investigation and Identification Team, issued on 27 January, concerning the attack that took place in Douma in April 2018 is another example of such violations. The OPCW report, for which I would like to thank Director-General Arias and the Coordinator of the Investigation and Identification Team, Mr. Oñate-Laborde, presents the following facts.

It documents that on 7 April 2018, at least one helicopter of the Syrian Arab Republic dropped two cylinders that struck residential buildings in Douma. Chlorine gas was released from those cylinders. The gas affects several systems of the body — the skin, mucous membranes, the digestive tract and the respiratory system, where it is absorbed by the lungs, giving us an idea of the fate suffered by those who were affected.

The OPCW concludes that “there are reasonable grounds to believe that the perpetrators of the attack were members of the Syrian Arab Air Force at the time of the incident”. To date, nine of the approximately 25 chemical attacks documented by the United Nations and the OPCW in Syria have been attributed to the Syrian Government.

Switzerland fully supports the conclusions of the report. We have full confidence in the OPCW, including the Investigation and Identification Team. Their work is crucial. Their professionalism and integrity are not in doubt.

Switzerland condemns the use of chemical weapons, including in Douma in 2018. We call on all parties to refrain from using such weapons and to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law. We echo the Secretary-General's repeated calls for those responsible for the use of such weapons to be held accountable.

Fact-finding is crucial to preventing further attacks and impunity for those crimes. In that regard, we welcome formal cooperation between the OPCW and the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Those Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011, which we fully support. Such cooperation is in line with the wishes of the Security Council, which, by unanimously adopting resolution 2118 (2013), 10 years ago, expressed its firm belief that those responsible for the use of chemical weapons in Syria must be held accountable.

We call on Syria to cooperate fully with the OPCW, accept OPCW-designated personnel and provide them with immediate and unhindered access to all sites. We hope that the recent visit by the streamlined Declaration Assessment Team, whose report is expected in March, will mark the resumption of Syria's full cooperation with the OPCW.

As the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Mrs. Nakamitsu — whom I thank — just reminded us, Syria must provide the OPCW Technical Secretariat with answers to the 20 outstanding issues so its initial declaration can be verified. We also note that, since 15 July 2021, the OPCW Technical Secretariat has been awaiting all relevant information from Syria regarding the unauthorized movement and destruction of the two cylinders used in the Douma attack.

In conclusion, I would like to remind us of the 43 victims of the use of chemical weapons in Douma. To honour their memory, it is our duty to ensure that those weapons are never again used by anyone, at any time, under any circumstances.

**Mr. Agyeman** (Ghana) (*spoke in French*): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the three African members of the Security Council — Gabon, Mozambique and my own country, Ghana (A3).

We thank Mrs. Izumi Nakamitsu, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, and

Mr. Fernando Arias, Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), as well as Mr. Santiago Oñate-Laborde, for their enlightening briefings on the status of the elimination of the Syrian chemical-weapon programme. We welcome the participation of the representatives of the Syrian Arab Republic, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Türkiye in this meeting.

(*spoke in English*)

On behalf of the A3, permit me to reiterate our deepest sympathies and condolences to the Governments and peoples of the Syrian Arab Republic and Türkiye following the tragic deaths and extensive infrastructural damage resulting from the 7.8- and 7.5-magnitude earthquake and tremor that struck parts of the two countries. Our thoughts and prayers are with the Governments and peoples of both countries at this difficult time. We call for increased international support for the emergency response and remain confident that the fortitude and resilience of the peoples of the Syrian Arab Republic and Türkiye will see them through the disaster.

We thank the OPCW for its 112th report covering the period from 24 December 2022 to 23 January 2023 (see S/2023/69), and express our support for its work as the foremost body responsible for ensuring the full elimination of Syria's chemical-weapon programme. In that regard, we welcome the conduct of limited in-country activities by a small group of members of the Declaration Assessment Team as part of the continued efforts of the OPCW Technical Secretariat to carry out its mandate in line with resolution 2118 (2013), and we look forward to the outcome of that mission. We also take note of the contents of the third report by the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team on the use of chemical weapons in Douma in the Syrian Arab Republic in April 2018. We take cognizance of the Syrian National Authority's submission to the Executive Council of its 110th monthly report regarding activities on its territory related to the destruction of its chemical weapons, as well as its chemical-weapon production facilities, as required of it by the Executive Council.

The international community, and the Security Council in particular, must continue to be concerned about the potential re-emergence and increasing threat of chemical warfare and take urgent steps to accelerate action towards a world free from chemical weapons. The A3 stands collectively against the use of

chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere and under any circumstances. We remain committed to the established norms against the use of chemical weapons and to all efforts to eliminate their production, storage and use, and we reiterate our support for resolution 2118 (2013). We believe that enhanced cooperation between the OPCW Technical Secretariat and the Syrian National Authority would be useful in making progress in that regard. As we have expressed in our previous statements, direct high-level exchanges between the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Syrian Arab Republic and the OPCW Director-General would be helpful in building confidence and providing the impetus needed to advance the various aspects of the programme and encourage greater commitment to strengthening cooperation. We hope that the two sides will expedite their efforts to prepare a meeting as soon as possible.

Finally, we urge the Council's support in finding more constructive ways to address the issues that constrain meaningful progress on the full implementation of resolution 2118 (2013). The early completion of the elimination of Syria's chemical weapons programme represents an important part of our common goal for international peace and security.

**Mr. De Almeida Filho (Brazil):** Like others, first and foremost, I would like to express Brazil's solidarity and most sincere condolences to the peoples of Syria and Türkiye for the losses they have suffered in the devastating earthquake that has hit both countries.

I would like to thank the Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), Ambassador Fernando Arias, for being with us today and for his detailed briefing. I also thank High Representative Nakamitsu for her briefing and Mr. Oñate-Laborde for his additional remarks. And I welcome the delegations of Syria, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Türkiye to this meeting.

We have taken note of the latest report by the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT), released on 27 January, regarding the use of chemical weapons in Douma in April 2018. As with previous IIT reports, the document has been submitted to Brazil's national authority, which will carry out a strict technical assessment of its content. Given the seriousness of the conclusions, we are of course committed to giving the report its due consideration. From Brazil's standpoint, the events described in the IIT report must

be addressed with transparency and subject to thorough and impartial analysis in accordance with the Chemical Weapons Convention. Furthermore, in cases like this it is important to highlight the need for close cooperation between the OPCW and the United Nations — especially the Security Council, recalling that the ultimate responsibility for attribution rests with this organ, according to the Charter of the United Nations.

We are in full agreement with Mr. Arias when he says that the use of chemical weapons anywhere is unacceptable and a breach of international law. That is in line with Brazil's long-standing position regarding the incompatibility with international humanitarian law of the threat or use of any weapons of mass destruction. We hereby reaffirm that Brazil strongly condemns the use of any chemical weapons anywhere, by anyone, in any circumstances. Any use of such weapons represents a serious threat to international peace and security in direct violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

In the Syrian case, we hope that the investigations conducted so far will provide a basis for proper accountability for the perpetrators of illegal acts. Furthermore, we expect the Syrian authorities and the OPCW to engage in effective cooperation in order to clarify the episodes of the use of chemical weapons and to address the outstanding questions regarding Syria's declared chemical-weapon arsenal and its destruction. We believe that those are necessary steps to close the so-called Syrian chemical file and prevent any future occurrence of the use of those abominable weapons.

**Mr. Hoxha (Albania):** I join my colleagues today in once again expressing our most sincere condolences to all affected by the terrible losses and destruction caused by the devastating earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria. Our first search-and-rescue team is already in Türkiye in Malatya, working with others in a race against time to save lives.

I would like to thank High Representative Nakamitsu, Director-General Arias and Coordinator Oñate-Laborde for the information they have provided. Their briefings were indeed long, but they were full of the kind of information and details we need, showing what it takes to get the truth and to the bottom of issues professionally and impartially.

The developments over the past 11 years in Syria are a perfect example of a user's manual for how a despotic regime can engineer the destruction of its country to the detriment of its people through the

use of extreme brutality against civilians, including torture, siege, collective punishment and the issue under discussion today — the use of chemical weapons. The use of poisonous and deadly chlorine gas by the Syrian army has been denounced many times in The Hague, in this Chamber and outside, as one of the most despicable *modus operandi* in that regard, in violation of the international standards and norms against chemical weapons.

After the dreadful events of 7 April 2018, witnesses, reporters, human rights groups and Governments were right to quickly point the finger in the right direction — the regime. Now the third report of the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) has clearly concluded that there are reasonable grounds to believe that the Syrian Arab Air Force used chemical weapons in Douma, an area populated by civilians — killing 43 people and affecting dozens more. I will therefore not repeat the details, which were presented here and are included in the report.

What matters is that those who used helicopters to drop barrel bombs on civilians are the same ones who used those helicopters for their barbaric attacks with chlorine. The report is unambiguous in its attribution. Once again, it was the regime. This is the ninth case of the use of chemical weapons independently attributed to the Syrian regime by the United Nations and OPCW mechanisms. This is not an accident. This is not an incident. This is not an issue of dysfunction somewhere in the chain of command. This translates a clear intention.

The report refers to Syria's continued lack of cooperation with the IIT, the obstruction of the investigation at the scene of the incident where it happened and the destruction of potential evidence — all despite the communication efforts of the IIT. That is not the behaviour of someone who is innocent and has nothing to hide.

We condemn, in the strongest terms, the repeated use of those atrocious weapons, in flagrant violation of international obligations. Syria has an obligation to cooperate with the OPCW and comply fully with resolution 2118 (2013). We welcome the work carried out by the IIT, which has pursued its activities with firm determination, total independence and unquestionable professionalism. We commend all the witnesses who contributed to the report, despite the intimidation of the

regime. Risking their lives and those of the families, they chose the truth and have contributed to justice.

The 112th monthly report of the OPCW Technical Secretariat (see S/2023/69) clearly shows that, based on the information of the identified gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies that remain unresolved, the statements submitted by Syria still cannot be considered accurate and complete. We deplore the continued lack of cooperation. We look forward with interest to the conclusions of the visit of the reduced Declaration Assessment Team in Syria, conducted from 17 to 20 January, and we also await the results of the ninth round of inspections, conducted in September 2022, at the Barzah and Jamrayah facilities.

Let me conclude by highlighting that, if we want to support Syria, we should start by supporting justice and accountability. That can be done by showing unity on the critical and unforgivable issue of the use of chemical weapons. Those attacks must not go unpunished; the perpetrators must be brought to justice. Impunity for the use of chemical weapons must not be tolerated in any circumstance, by anyone, anywhere, and we believe that the reaction of the Council must be up to par. A democratic Syria will not be born by supporting and shielding the very regime that did everything to get the country to where it finds itself today. It will come by effectively supporting the Syrian people in their legitimate quest for a peaceful and democratic future.

**Mr. Sun Zhiqiang** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China would like to once again express its deepest condolences to the Governments and the peoples of Türkiye and Syria for the strong earthquakes that led to heavy casualties and property damage. In the face of this major disaster, China is doing its utmost to provide assistance. The Chinese Government will provide an initial batch of ¥40 million in emergency aid to Türkiye. Chinese rescue teams are now rushing to the affected areas of Türkiye in order to join the rescue work. We are also coordinating the delivery of urgently needed relief supplies to Syria and expediting the implementation of ongoing food aid programmes. We sincerely hope that the people of Türkiye and Syria will overcome the disaster and rebuild their homes as soon as possible.

We thank High Representative Nakamitsu for her briefing and welcome Director-General Arias to today's meeting.

On issues related to chemical weapons, China's position is consistent. China firmly opposes the use of chemical weapons by anyone, under any circumstances and for any purpose, and hopes that our world will be rid of all chemical weapons as soon as possible. We urge countries that possess chemical weapons to destroy them all as soon as possible.

China has always believed that dialogue and negotiations are the only right way to resolve the issues related to Syria's chemical weapons. We note that the Syrian Government has stated on many occasions that it firmly opposes the use of chemical weapons by anyone and under any circumstances, and is ready to work with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in order to resolve outstanding issues.

Regarding the divergent interpretations of many issues by the Syrian Government and the Technical Secretariat, we maintain that science and facts should be respected and an objective and fair approach upheld. Both parties should continue thorough discussions and work towards meeting each other halfway, striving to jointly resolve outstanding issues as soon as possible.

Recently, the Syrian Government and the OPCW Technical Secretariat reached consensus on the conduct of activities in Syria by a small team of members of the Declaration Assessment Team. Such a development is welcome. China calls on the international community to view Syria's efforts objectively, and hopes that the Technical Secretariat can respond to Syria's concerns and appeals in a professional and transparent manner.

On the new report recently released by the IIT, we must first point out that the initial establishment of the IIT went beyond the remit of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and violated the tradition of consensus in the OPCW. Its working methods and procedures do not meet the requirements of the CWC and its Verification Annex. Many countries, including China, have expressed their objections from the very beginning. China's position on this has not changed.

Based on that position, we would like to express our reservations on the choice of briefers for this meeting and regret that the President did not conduct extensive consultations with Council members in that regard. China reiterates that the investigation and handling of the alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria must return to the framework of the CWC. We hope that Director-General Arias and the Technical

Secretariat will promote the resumption of the tradition of consensus by States parties and effectively maintain the authority and effectiveness of the OPCW.

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

I too wish to start by expressing Malta's condolences to the people of Türkiye and Syria following the devastating earthquake. A humanitarian assistance team from Malta is already on the ground in order to assist in the recovery.

I thank High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu, Director-General Arias and Ambassador Oñate-Laborde, Coordinator of the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), for their insightful briefings today.

Malta underlines its full support for the independent, unbiased and expert work of the OPCW and its Technical Secretariat. As the implementer of the global prohibition of chemical weapons, the OPCW, including its Investigation and Identification Team, the Fact-Finding Mission and the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT), plays a vital role in ensuring the complete elimination of all chemical weapons in Syria. Let me assure the Director-General of Malta's full confidence in the organization.

Since our meeting last month (see S/PV.9235), the Investigation and Identification Team published its third report, concluding that there are reasonable grounds to believe that the Syrian Arab Air Force was the perpetrator of the chemical-weapon attack in Douma on 7 April 2018, killing 43 people and affecting dozens more. This represents the ninth occasion, thus far, that OPCW and joint United Nations-OPCW investigations have concluded that Syria used chemical weapons against its own people. That is unconscionable and deeply concerning.

This latest report is clear on its methodology and findings, adhering to best practices of international fact-finding bodies and commissions of investigation and to applicable OPCW procedures, including on chain of custody. The IIT was unable to obtain any concrete information supporting lines of inquiry and scenarios suggested by Syria and its allies despite thorough investigations.

The report demonstrates Syria's continued failure to fully cooperate with the OPCW. Malta regrets that

the Syrian authorities failed to grant access to the sites of the incident despite Syria's obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention and resolution 2118 (2013). That follows an unfortunate pattern of behaviour by Syria on this file.

We regret to note that the list of pending declarations and other documents requested by the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) since 2019 has not yet been provided by the Syrian Arab Republic, and that the declaration submitted is still considered inaccurate and incomplete. Malta welcomes the Technical Secretariat's initiative in sending a reduced DAT team to Syria, and we look forward to reading the next DAT report.

On the proposed meeting between the Director-General and Foreign Minister Mekdad, Malta hopes that the resumed communication between focal points will lead to progress so that the meeting can finally take place.

Malta firmly believes in the universalization of the global norm on the prohibition of chemical weapons, underpinned by the Chemical Weapons Convention. It goes without saying that there can never be a justification for their use. The Security Council must uphold the international ban on the use of chemical weapons. Those who use those abhorrent weapons must be held accountable.

We call on Syria to cooperate with the OPCW and to present the necessary assurances on its chemical weapons programme, in accordance with the Chemical Weapons Convention. That is the only way in which the world can be assured that Syria's chemical weapons programme has been completely and verifiably eliminated.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to Mr. Arias to respond to comments and questions raised.

**Mr. Arias:** It was said that the briefing was empty. Everything is related to a report that has 124 pages, which is comprehensive, extensive and accurate, and the statements by the representatives of France, the United Kingdom, the United Arab Emirates, Japan, Ecuador, Switzerland, Ghana, Brazil, Albania, China and the United States of America demonstrate that the meeting is truly substantive. A certain ambassador questioned the responsibility of the Director-General. I want to say that the Director-General is delivering, but he is

delivering on the basis of the mandates that he received, together with his team. The mandates are given by the policy-making organs; they are not received from a single ambassador or Permanent Representative.

My so-called predecessor was mentioned. The delegation said that Mr. Bustani was my predecessor. Mr. Bustani was the Director-General who left the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) 21 years ago, and he has no knowledge of the substantive affairs with which we are currently dealing at the Organization.

With regard to my briefings to the Security Council, it is always a great pleasure for me to speak before the Security Council. I have addressed it five times. This is the fifth time that I have been here in four and a half years. My predecessors were never at the Security Council as frequently. But, when I address the Security Council, it is when there is something really new and substantive that can complete the very good reports and very good briefings given on monthly basis by the High Representative.

Let us now turn to more substantive questions. The legality and legitimacy of the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) have been called into question. Article VIII, paragraph 19, of the Chemical Weapons Convention provides that the Conference of the States Parties shall consider any questions, matters or issues within the scope of the Convention. It also provides that the Conference may make recommendations and take decisions on such questions, matters or issues raised by a State party or brought to its attention by the Executive Council, and the Conference can do that on its own authority. It is for the Conference to decide on its own competence, as set out in rule 64 of its rules of procedure.

The decision adopted on 27 June 2018, on the basis of which the IIT was established, was adopted by the Conference in accordance with the rules that are clearly set out in the Convention and the Conference rules related to the procedure. It was adopted by a vote of member States. I recall that there are 193 States members of the OPCW. As was mentioned here several times, the decision was adopted in line with a very well-established position of the international community, namely, that the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons must be held accountable.

Subsequent to the adoption of that decision, the Technical Secretariat carried out the mandate entrusted

to it under the Convention and by the Conference. Accordingly, the Technical Secretariat will continue to implement the mandates that it receives, because the role of the Technical Secretariat is not to interpret or evaluate the decisions of the Conference or the Executive Council. The role of the Technical Secretariat is to implement them in the best way that we can, and that is what we do.

The decision was adopted according to the rules. The IIT was set up by the Technical Secretariat according to the rules. I must recall that any decision of the Conference or the Executive Council of the OPCW is legally binding for both States parties and the Technical Secretariat. That is in relation to the legitimacy of the OPCW.

The methodology of the IIT regarding its investigations was also called into question. Ambassador Oñate Laborde will complete my information, but I want to say something that must be said here in the Chamber. The methods of the IIT follow the highest standards regarding the procedures generally accepted by international organizations and best practices of fact-finding bodies and commissions of inquiry. We follow the method of corroboration. But what is corroboration? I want to clarify what corroboration is in the investigation of an international case.

In the context of the work of the IIT, and, more generally, in all the units of the Technical Secretariat concerned, the definition of corroboration is the action of confirming whether information of diverse natures and origins supports a finding, theory or statement. It is about adding support and credibility to such findings, or to an idea previously presented. Corroboration also takes place in the context of supporting elements already previously supported or confirmed by other means. Ambassador Oñate Laborde already mentioned that in his briefing. The IIT works on the basis of that method. Together with his team, he has been gathering as much information as possible, and the IIT has indeed gained access to a great deal of information of diverse natures and origins in the course of almost two years of investigation. The IIT has assessed the credibility and authenticity of that information and has analysed and studied it, supported by the best experts. It finally identified when such corroboration, as just defined, could take place, and that is the only way to investigate.

Sometimes the idea of reasonable grounds to believe has also been questioned. I have to say that the

Technical Secretariat cannot bend the facts we find to accommodate some people's or States' perceptions of reality. We work only on the basis of facts. On the other hand, it is very clear that we work on the basis of reasonable grounds to believe. The theories that have been discarded were discarded because we found that there were no reasonable grounds to believe that any other hypothesis put forward so far was credible.

Once and for all, it is clear that the concept of reasonable grounds to believe is the standard approach used by international investigative bodies. I have in front of me a list of at least 20 international bodies that use the same method — the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine; the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia; the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the Independent Fact-Finding Mission on Libya. I can continue reading. I can give the Council a copy of the text I have, but the most interesting thing is that, among other information from important legislation and organizations, I have here articles 376 and 431.1 of the Civil Code of the Russian Federation, which also refer to reasonable grounds to believe in cases of inquiries of investigations. That is the standard method, and the method we have been using.

During this meeting, the work of the IIT and the Technical Secretariat has been put in question. It was said that the work was falsified and that we produce lies, and so forth. I have to react to what I heard from one delegation. We read the comments, and we listen attentively to what is said. In all the documents of the Technical Secretariat, no one will ever find a single inappropriate comment with regard to any person, State or institution. We respect everybody. In all our documents, it can be seen that we read, we listen, we analyse, we report and, accordingly, respecting everybody, we deliver. It is very unfortunate that this is not always reciprocated. I want to tell the Security Council that I cannot and will not accept personal discourtesies of the kind I have heard today in this Chamber and read in the past. It is important for the Council to know that I am very proud of the Technical Secretariat's members and their work. And in this instance, I am particularly satisfied with the team led by Ambassador Oñate-Laborde, a high-ranking diplomat and lawyer. Perhaps he would like to complete the discussion of my methodology.

**The President:** I am sorry, Mr. Director-General, but the questions were posed to you, Sir, and I therefore feel that it is you who should complete the replies. If you are done with responding to the questions, I will give the floor to other Council members who have requested it.

**Mr. Arias:** I do not mind continuing to respond.

With regard to the question concerning the two yellow cylinders found in Douma and the different hypotheses that have been put on the table, I took notes on the question and can respond. As Council members know, the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) was unable to access the site of the two locations of the incident in Douma. Despite resolution 2118 (2013) — which states in paragraph 7 that the Security Council decides that the Syrian Arab Republic shall cooperate fully with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the United Nations by providing their personnel with immediate and unfettered access to and the right to inspect all sites in discharging their functions — the IIT could not access the sites because the Syrian Arab Republic did not issue the team members' visas. That means that the IIT had to work on the basis of other information. We have pictures, but we should say that we had a lot of information because of the fact that the mission had access to the site just about three weeks after the incident, when it took more than 100 samples and many photos and videos.

On 9 July 2021, the Syrian Arab Republic informed the Technical Secretariat that the two cylinders had been destroyed. They were destroyed 60 kilometres from the place where the OPCW inspectors had deposited them in the custody of the Syrian Arab Republic. The IIT requested information related to the destruction, including why those two cylinders were located 60 kilometres away — far away — from the place where they had been deposited and sealed with the agreement that the cylinders would not be touched, unsealed or removed except with the written permission of the Technical Secretariat.

Since we could not access the site, but did have access to a lot of information, the IIT decided to work on that information. The information was basically imagery and the expertise of top institutions and persons in a number of places. The images we had were subjected to imagery analysis to obtain the metadata extraction and corroboration of that metadata extraction by several

different experts. Three munitions specialists were consulted, and a specialized forensic institute was in charge of conducting the study.

I should say that similar cylinders were found in the incidents in Latamenah, an attack that as Council members know took place on 25 March 2017, and in Saraqib, on 4 February 2018. Those incidents are related to the first and second report of the IIT. The cylinders are very similar because the attack, logistically speaking, was similar. At location 2, which is the building where most of the people were and where the 43 fatalities occurred, the valve of the cylinder ruptured and released chlorine gas in big quantities in a very short period of time. At location 4, the valve of the cylinder did not rupture, and the cylinder released the gas more slowly.

What can we see from the results of the study of the cylinders at location 2? The cylinder was visibly deformed. The cylinder was blackened by soot. Immediately after the incident, part of it was white-coloured, and the following day it was yellow. The metal cradles attached to the cylinder were detached and very corroded. Two circular metal plates are visible in the photos. One was recovered by the Fact-Finding Mission. Why is everything I said relevant? How do we explain those observations? The deformation of the cylinder is due to the strong impact against the top of the building. The black soot was caused by the fire that ignited after the incident. The white colouration that could be seen in the first photos that we have of the cylinder was formed by frost on its surface, which is consistent with the auto-refrigeration phenomenon, having occurred upon the rapid release of a liquefied gas from the cylinder. The white colouration disappeared the next day, uncovering the original yellow colouration. It is a very well-known phenomenon. The metal cradles were detached upon impact and suffered heavy corrosion as a consequence of the released chlorine gas, which is highly corrosive to metals.

At location 4, the other building that was inhabited, the cylinder and the cradle showed deformations that were studied and underwent calculations through dynamic simulations by experts. The cradle was still attached and was of the same design as that at location 2, and was also similar in design to the those in the previous incidents I already mentioned. The relatively faster degradation of the cradle indicates that a corrosive chemical substance remained on site



for a period of time, indicating that the valve was not ruptured and released the chlorine little by little. The first instance of corrosion could not have been caused by natural humidity. It took place at a slower rate than at location 2, through the slow release of gas from the cylinder. Both cylinders were designed with multiple straps, handles and a set of wheels to facilitate loading and unloading them from aircraft. They were especially designed to be delivered by air. Mi-8 or Mi-17 helicopters are particularly suitable for dropping that kind of cylinder. They have a large cargo bay, and the cylinders can be easily pushed out.

Let us turn to the hypotheses that, as some have proposed, the cylinders were delivered by surface, manually placed or launched from adjacent buildings. Why have those three hypotheses been discarded —

**The President:** I am very sorry. We have interpretation only until 1 p.m. We have other members who need to speak. We very much appreciate the technical replies that Mr. Arias is giving us. But I think that we have gotten the gist of the fact that he has ample information and evidence to substantiate the claims of the report of the Investigation and Identification Team. I think that perhaps they should be sent to the Security Council, which we can share.

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

**Mr. Nebenzia** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I would like to once again state that, despite Mr. Arias' detailed explanations in the course of this meeting today, he has continued to fail to provide a substantive answer to any of the questions asked not just by us, but also by the community of experts who are outraged by the unprecedented violations of the work of the Technical Secretariat of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). We have not heard anything except assurances of the highest standards of the OPCW investigations. I wonder whether Mr. Arias can differentiate the information that the OPCW was provided by the White Helmets from the evidence first collected by the Douma inspectors and subsequently rejected by the OPCW Technical Secretariat, which was ordered to rewrite its initial report.

The situation involving the fabrications of the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission report on Douma, including the sanctions against the inspectors who were not afraid of telling the truth, remains a stain on the reputation

of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. We have once again seen today that the Director-General has nothing to say when confronted by glaring facts. The Syrian chemical dossier, not least because of him, is becoming a vivid example of, and a synonym for, lies, fabrications and settling political scores on behalf of Western States, which are being served obediently by the OPCW Technical Secretariat. We have seen that very clearly once again today.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

**Mr. Sabbagh** (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Madam President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month and wish you every success. I would also like to thank your predecessor, the Permanent Representative of Japan, for his efforts during his country's presidency of the Council last month.

I would like to address my thanks and appreciation to the Member States that have expressed their condolences to the Government and the people of the Syrian Arab Republic for the victims of the devastating earthquake that hit many Syrian cities early Monday morning. The Government of my country has called on the States Members of the United Nations to support the Syrian people and the Government's efforts to address that humanitarian disaster, in terms of search and rescue or providing emergency food and medication assistance. Time is of the essence, and urgent assistance will save many lives.

The Syrian Arab Republic took a strategic decision in 2013 to join the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and completely destroyed its stockpile of those weapons in record time, despite the difficult circumstances it was going through. The United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) confirmed that.

The Syrian Arab Republic has cooperated openly and transparently with the OPCW, facilitated the visits of its various teams and was keen to work with it in order to correct its wrong working methods that affected the credibility of its reports and distanced it from the professional role and technical mandate entrusted to it by the CWC.

During a significant part of this meeting, the report of the so-called Investigation and Identification Team

(IIT) on the alleged incident in Douma was addressed. My delegation would like therefore to clarify its position as follows.

First, the Syrian Arab Republic has consistently and repeatedly affirmed its firm position of condemning the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anytime, anywhere and under any circumstances.

Second, immediately after claims of an alleged use of chemical weapons in Douma on 17 April 2018, the Syrian Arab Republic requested the Director-General of the OPCW to send a Fact-Finding Mission to investigate that incident. However, its arrival to Damascus was delayed for a whole week for unknown reasons.

Third, on 26 April 2018, the Syrian Arab Republic and the Russian Federation brought 17 witnesses from the site of the incident in the city of Douma to the OPCW's headquarter at The Hague to testify about that alleged chemical attack. At a press conference, they refuted all the allegations that had been fabricated by terrorist groups and their supporters, stressing that they were all staged allegations. However, the Fact-Finding Mission did not interview them and their testimonies were not heard.

Fourth, in the same context, many academics, independent military experts and specialists from the OPCW, such as Mr. José Bustani, the first Director-General of the Organization, and inspector Ian Henderson, who led the team that investigated the Douma incident, as well as many others, provided accurate scientific analysis and professionally refuted the conclusions contained in the report of the Fact-Finding Mission on the alleged Douma incident and proved that the report was unprofessional, biased and unfair.

Fifth, the Syrian Arab Republic had stressed that the Fact-Finding Mission's incorrect and unprofessional approach to the Douma incident would naturally lead to erroneous conclusions. Unfortunately, the Fact-Finding Mission did not rectify the incorrect and unprofessional working methods that it followed during its investigation despite all the calls for it to adhere to the rules stipulated in the CWC and the terms of reference agreed with Syria. The collection of evidence without the slightest level of credibility, the samples without a legal chain of custody and the reliance on suspicious open sources and fabricated and misleading information provided by terrorist organizations and their affiliates — namely, the White Helmets, who are

sponsored by Western intelligence services — cannot constitute a scientific or professional basis and cannot lead to objective conclusions. Mr. Arias said that some samples had been collected and some samples had been received. Does that reflect the provisions of the CWC, which he is entrusted to implement? He used the term “highest standards and best practices”. Does that phrase exist in the Convention? Where did he get it from?

Sixth, the decision adopted on 27 June 2018 by the fourth special session of the Conference of the States Parties to the CWC, according to which the so-called IIT was established, constituted a dangerous turning point in the history of the OPCW, clearly reflecting the colossal politicization carried out by the United States and its Western allies, pushing the technical organization into a political labyrinth that has undermined its credibility. That decision, which was supported by less than half of the OPCW member States — only 82 out of 193 countries — following the flagrant manipulation of the provisions of the CWC and the clear infringement of its provisions by attributing responsibility not stipulated in the Convention, has made the establishment of the IIT illegitimate. Accordingly, the Syrian Arab Republic and other countries announced that they do not recognize that illegitimate Team and therefore do not recognize its reports.

Seventh, the so-called IIT took years to inform us of a conclusion identical to the accusations that the countries of the tripartite aggression against Syria, namely, the United States, France and the United Kingdom, levelled only hours after the fabrication of the alleged incident in Douma. They used the incident as a pretext for acts of aggression on several military and civilian sites in Syria and to impose more sanctions and an unjust siege on the Syrian people. That aggression clearly demonstrates that the alleged Douma incident is the product of a plot invented by those countries to strike the Syrian Arab Army forces at a time when the latter was making progress in its battle against terrorism by targeting terrorists' cells and fortifications with focused and accurate strikes using its conventional weapons. Therefore, the report of the IIT was issued only to justify the aggression of those three countries against Syria on 24 April 2018, and that explains the applause and welcome with which those three countries received the report in today's meeting.

The Syrian Arab Republic stresses its non-recognition of the so-called IIT and its reports. We categorically reject those reports, including their

erroneous conclusions. We consider the issuance of the IIT report as yet another confirmation of the continued politicization of that dossier by the United States and its Western allies and their manipulation of such reports to serve their agendas.

Twenty years ago, and specifically on 5 February 2003, Colin Powell, the United States Secretary of State at that time, was in this Chamber to play a theatrical role in a play of deception prepared in advance to justify the United States invasion of Iraq under the pretext of its possession of weapons of mass destruction. It turned out later that all of that was just baseless lies, and Mr. Powell himself described what he said before the Council as a “disgrace”.

Today is similar to that day — the same theatrics, the same lies and the same mastermind — but this time the target is Syria, under a similar pretext of it possessing and using chemical weapons. Therefore, the world must learn from the lessons of the past, and not allow the United States and its allies to play such a misleading game once again. The crimes committed by the United States in Iraq are incontestable, and that is why we say to those who talk about accountability and get excited about it that they should demand that the United States be held accountable for those crimes. We wanted them to have the courage to demand accountability for the countries that provided all forms of support to terrorist organizations in Syria and enabled them to possess and use toxic weapons and chemicals. They should have the same enthusiasm to hold the United States of America accountable for the crimes it has committed against the Syrian people and the destruction by its planes of Syrian cities over the heads of their residents.

Before concluding my statement, I would like to address the Director-General, Mr. Arias, who dedicated one third of his statement to talk about accountability, and ask the following: who entrusted him with implementing that task, and what provision in the Convention mandated him to carry out that task?

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

**Mr. Jalil Irvani** (Islamic Republic of Iran): I congratulate Malta on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month and acknowledge Japan for the successful completion of its presidency in January.

We express our sincere condolences to the Governments and the people of Türkiye and Syria for the devastating earthquake that struck both countries. Our thoughts are with our brothers and sisters in both countries who have been devastated by that tragic earthquake.

We welcome the presence of Mrs. Nakamitsu, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, as well as Mr. Arias, Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), at today’s meeting.

As the main victim of chemical weapons in contemporary history, Iran strongly condemns the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere, under any circumstances. The use of such weapons and other types of weapons of mass destruction is a crime against humanity and a blatant violation of international law. The use of chemical weapons is a source of great tragedy, as our people have experienced its devastating effects first-hand. During the eight-year war imposed by Saddam’s regime on Iran, some Western countries either remained silent or actively supported the systematic use of chemical weapons against the Iranian people by supplying and providing such weapons of mass destruction to Saddam’s regime. Now those same countries are manipulating the OPCW to further their own political agendas, potentially misusing it and its mechanisms in the case of Syria.

We are deeply concerned about the exploitation and politicization of the Chemical Weapons Convention and the OPCW. The abuse of their processes by certain Western States has caused division among Member States, eroded the OPCW’s legitimacy and credibility and weakened the trust in the multilateral disarmament machinery. Such political exploitation is demonstrated in the recent premeditated scenario against the Syrian Arab Republic by certain Western States that have used the illegal mandate of the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) for furthering their political goals. The IIT report of 27 January, as similar reports before it, is based on unauthorized sources and lacks the required legal conclusions. It also disregards the observations of the Syrian Government. Those flaws must not be overlooked, but must be addressed responsibly in order to ensure the integrity of OPCW reports.

We have stated time and again that technical issues must be resolved collaboratively rather than through political pressure, which has repeatedly proven to be

a failed strategy that jeopardizes the entire process aimed at resolving outstanding issues. It is unfortunate that the credible information provided by the Syrian Government regarding the use of chemical weapons by terrorist groups has been ignored by the OPCW. Meanwhile, the Israeli regime, a non-party with a clandestine weapons of mass destruction programme, is being rewarded by certain Western countries. It is clear that the timely consideration of the information could have led to the elimination of terrorist groups, instead of concealing their actions. That is especially true considering the potential exposure of false allegations made by some Western countries, which, in some cases, resulted in military action against Syria.

The primary responsibility of the OPCW is to destroy chemical weapons, as the first pillar of the Convention, but its efforts are being hindered by the ongoing delay by the United States, the only major remaining possessor of those inhumane weapons. A politically motivated approach by the organization will divert attention from that urgent need and serve the interests of the United States, a possessor State party.

Iran supports Syria and the OPCW in engaging in constructive dialogue at the highest level and their cooperation to resolve outstanding issues within a specific time frame and, finally, close the file. To that end, any investigation must be impartial, professional, credible, objective and fully comply with the Convention's requirements and procedures.

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

**Mrs. Özgür (Türkiye):** Let me start by sincerely thanking you, Madam President, and other Security Council members, as well as Mrs. Nakamitsu, Mr. Arias and Mr. Oñate-Laborde, for their expressions of condolences, support and solidarity at this difficult time.

We thank Under-Secretary-General Nakamitsu, Director-General Arias and Coordinator Oñate-Laborde for their briefings. We commend the independence, impartiality and professionalism upheld by the Technical Secretariat of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

The OPCW Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) was established with a mandate to identify those responsible for the chemical weapons attacks in Syria. Türkiye co-sponsored the decision granting that mandate to the OPCW in 2018. Last month, in its third report, the IIT concluded that the Syrian regime was the perpetrator of the chlorine gas attack that took place in Douma on 7 April 2018. That follows the IIT's two previous two, both of which confirmed the responsibility of the regime in three chemical weapons attacks in Latamenah in March 2017 and the chlorine gas attack in Saraqib in February 2018.

The use of chemical weapons is a grave violation of international law and unacceptable under any circumstances. Türkiye strongly condemns the repeated use of chemical weapons in Syria. We will continue to support the efforts, first and foremost, of the United Nations and the OPCW that are aimed at ensuring accountability in Syria. That is also our collective responsibility for the hundreds of innocent lives lost due to the chemical weapons attacks in the country.

We have heard from High Representative Nakamitsu that the outstanding issues in relation to the Syrian regime's initial and subsequent declarations persist. We once again call on the Syrian regime to fully cooperate with the OPCW Technical Secretariat and provide the necessary information, as it is obligated to do so under the Convention.

Lastly, at Council meetings held in recent months under this agenda item, we have emphasized the significance of continued regular consideration by the Council of the Syrian chemical weapons programme. The recent developments, including the third IIT report, only reaffirm that necessity. Therefore, as a neighbouring country, we urge the Council to maintain this crucial item on its monthly calendar.

**The President:** There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject at 3 p.m.

*The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.*