



Security Council

Seventy-eighth year

9275th meeting

Monday, 6 March 2023, 3 p.m.

New York

Provisional

President: Mr. Afonso (Mozambique)

Members:

Albania	Mr. Spasse
Brazil	Mr. Parga Cintra
China	Mr. Sun Zhiqiang
Ecuador	Mr. Pérez Loose
France	Mr. De Rivière
Gabon	Mr. Biang
Ghana	Mr. Boateng
Japan	Mr. Hamamoto
Malta	Mr. Camilleri
Russian Federation	Mr. Shevchenko
Switzerland	Mr. Hauri
United Arab Emirates	Ms. AlMatrooshi
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Ms. Jacobs
United States of America	Mr. Mills

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Letter dated 28 February 2023 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2023/158)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Letter dated 28 February 2023 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2023/158)

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 Mrs. Izumi Nakamitsu, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, to participate in this meeting.

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

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2023/158, which contains the text of a letter dated 28 February 2023 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council.

I now give the floor to Mrs. Nakamitsu.

Mrs. Nakamitsu: I thank Council members for the opportunity to brief them on the implementation of Security Council resolution 2118 (2013) on the elimination of the chemical weapons programme of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Since the last consideration of this matter by the Council, and consistent with established practice, the Office for Disarmament Affairs has been in regular contact with its counterparts at the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) on activities related to resolution 2118 (2013).

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 (see S/PV.9255). Unfortunately, all efforts by the OPCW Technical Secretariat to organize the next round of consultations between the DAT and the Syrian National Authority continue to be unsuccessful.

As Council members were previously informed, the OPCW Technical Secretariat has provided the Syrian Arab Republic with the list of pending declarations and other documents requested by the DAT since 2019 that could assist in resolving the current 20 outstanding issues. However, I have been advised that the OPCW Technical Secretariat has not yet received any such pending declarations or other documents from the Syrian Arab Republic. This includes the complete declaration of activities at the Scientific Studies and Research Centre (SSRC) and the declaration of quantities of nerve agents produced at one chemical weapons production facility that was declared by the Syrian Arab Republic as never having been used to produce chemical weapons.

Owing to this situation, and in a further attempt to implement the mandate, a reduced team comprised of some members of the DAT deployed to conduct limited in-country activities in the Syrian Arab Republic from 17 to 22 January 2023. It is my understanding that these activities did not involve any technical consultations with the Syrian National Authority. The outcome of that mission will be included in the next report of the DAT.

The OPCW Technical Secretariat remains fully committed to verifying the full implementation by the Syrian Arab Republic of all its declaration requirements and to assisting Syria in fulfilling its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention, decisions by OPCW policy-making organs and Security Council resolution 2118 (2013).

However, as has been previously emphasized, full cooperation by the Syrian Arab Republic with the OPCW Technical Secretariat is essential to closing all outstanding issues. Considering the identified gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies that remain unresolved, at this time the OPCW Technical Secretariat assesses that the declaration submitted by the Syrian Arab Republic still cannot be considered accurate and complete in accordance with the Chemical Weapons Convention.

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

I regret to inform the Council that the Syrian Arab Republic has yet to provide sufficient technical information or explanations that would enable the OPCW Technical Secretariat to close the issue related to the detection of a Schedule 2 chemical at the Barzah facilities of the SSRC in November 2018.

Regarding the unauthorized movement of the two cylinders related to the chemical weapons incident that took place in Douma on 7 April 2018, in which said cylinders were destroyed in an attack on a chemical weapons production facility, and although the Syrian Arab Republic shared with the OPCW Technical Secretariat on 8 February 2023 pictures from the site at which the cylinders were reportedly destroyed, the OPCW Technical Secretariat is still awaiting information related to the unauthorized movement of those cylinders. I again call upon the Syrian Arab Republic to respond with urgency to all of the OPCW Technical Secretariat's requests.

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

It is my understanding that the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) continues to provide support to the OPCW mission in Syria, in accordance with the Tripartite Agreement concluded between the OPCW, UNOPS and the Syrian Arab Republic. The current extension of that agreement remains in force until and including 30 June 2023.

I have been advised that the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) continues to study all available information related to allegations of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic. In that context, I understand that the FFM was deployed to the Syrian Arab Republic from 6 to 12 November 2022 and is currently preparing upcoming deployments.

The Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) also continues its investigations into incidents in which the FFM has determined that chemical weapons were used or likely used in the Syrian Arab Republic. On 2 February 2023, the Director-General of the OPCW and the Coordinator of the IIT briefed States parties in The Hague on the third report of the IIT, in which the IIT concluded that the Syrian Arab Air Force was responsible for the use of chemical weapons in an incident in Douma on 7 April 2018, killing at least 43 named individuals and affecting dozens of others. Council members will recall that at the invitation of the President of the Security Council, the Director-General and the Coordinator of the IIT also briefed the Security Council on the report during last month's meeting, on 7 February. The IIT will issue further reports in due course.

In closing, I would like to reiterate that any use of chemical weapons is a grave violation of international law, and it is imperative that those responsible for such attacks are identified and held accountable. That is not only what we owe the victims of such attacks, but it is also critical for international peace and security to ensure continued respect for the strict norm against chemical weapons. It is my sincere hope that the members of the Council will unite on this 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 shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Mills (United States of America): I thank High Representative Nakamitsu for her briefing.

Last month, we listened carefully to the briefings by the Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the Coordinator of the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) on the IIT's latest attribution report on the deadly chemical weapons attack on Douma in 2018 (see S/PV.9255). The Security Council must respond to those findings and take steps to ensure the full implementation of resolution 2118 (2013), as well as seek accountability for the heinous actions perpetrated by the Al-Assad regime.

The steps to do so are clear. As we have discussed repeatedly in the Council, the Syrian regime must comply with its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention and resolution 2118 (2013). It must credibly account for its chemical weapons and chemical weapons production facilities and verifiably complete their destruction.

Month after month, however, and year after year, the regime has failed to do so. In order to address these shortfalls, the Al-Assad regime must permit the return to Syria of the full OPCW Declaration Assessment Team without delay so that it can resume the important mission of conducting inspections and accounting for all the many discrepancies and many omissions associated with the Syrian chemical weapons declaration. While we welcome news that a limited team visited Damascus in January, that deployment fell

short of Syria's obligations under resolution 2118 (2013) to accept personnel designated by the OPCW and to provide them immediate and unfettered access to any and all sites.

It is crucial that we seek accountability for the chemical weapons attacks that the Al-Assad regime has conducted against its own people. We all heard last month the unequivocal assessment from the OPCW that the Syrian Arab Air Force carried out the 2018 chemical weapons attack in Douma, killing dozens of men, women and children and injuring countless more. As the report noted, Russia controlled the airspace and operated from the same base from which the Syrian Arab Air Force launched the attack. The finding that the Al-Assad regime carried out the attack, unfortunately, was not unique. The OPCW and the United Nations have found that the Syrian regime used chemical weapons against its people on nine occasions. Such clear violations of the Chemical Weapons Convention demand accountability.

The United States has already imposed sanctions and visa ineligibilities against more than 300 individuals and entities linked to Syria's chemical weapons programme. We commend other countries that have done the same. We call on other countries to impose similar measures, and we urge countries to refrain from normalizing relations with the Syrian regime until there is redress for those and other grave injustices to the people of Syria.

In that regard, we welcome a recent joint statement condemning the regime's use of chemical weapons that was issued by the International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons, a group of 40 nations committed to combating the use of chemical weapons anywhere, by anyone.

The United States will continue to support investigative efforts such as 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 (IIIM), which is building case files on violations and abuses in Syria, including the use of chemical weapons, and sharing that information with prosecutors. The IIIM's work has already helped lead to 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 that President Biden recently signed into law.

Accountability for such heinous acts is the least we can do for the victims of chemical weapons attacks. We have said it too many times in the Council, unfortunately, because we have had to. There must be no impunity for the use of chemical weapons. The Security Council cannot abdicate its responsibility. We must ensure that Syria complies with resolution 2118 (2013), and we call on the Syrian regime to immediately fulfil its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention. We urge the Council and all its Members to seek accountability on behalf of the victims of these horrific chemical weapons attacks. The stakes are simply too high for all of us to do otherwise.

Mr. Pérez Loose (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Mrs. Nakamitsu, for her briefing, which once again shows the lack of progress on the issue of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic.

Any incident that involves the use of chemical weapons must be dealt with in a transparent manner and be subject to thorough and impartial investigations, in accordance with the convention governing that matter.

We therefore reiterate our insistence that the Syrian authorities comply with their obligations under that convention, international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 2118 (2013), 2209 (2015) and 2235 (2015), and facilitate and engage in effective and unimpeded cooperation with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

We regret the fact that, despite the efforts made by the OPCW Declaration Assessment Team since 2019 to clarify all outstanding issues in relation to Syria, inconsistencies persist, as a result of which the country's national declaration still cannot be deemed accurate and complete. The Syrian Arab Republic should respond promptly and diligently regarding all outstanding issues.

I reiterate Ecuador's support for the OPCW and its technical and investigative teams, which, despite countless obstacles, carry out their work in a professional, independent and impartial manner. We await the results of the visit by a small group of members of the Declaration Assessment Team.

The findings of the third report of the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team, which we learned about last month (see S/PV.9255), establish sufficient grounds to point to the Syrian Arab Air Force as the perpetrator of the chemical attack in the city of Douma on 7 April 2018. There can be no impunity for those responsible for such acts.

Finally, I reiterate Ecuador's categorical condemnation of the production, stockpiling and use of weapons of mass destruction, including chemical weapons, by anyone, anywhere and under any circumstances.

Ms. Jacobs (United Kingdom): I thank Under-Secretary-General Nakamitsu for her excellent briefing, as always.

As we discussed last month (see S/PV.9255), the Douma report is further confirmation of Syria's disdain for its obligations under international law. We again commend the Investigation and Identification Team's integrity, impartiality and professionalism in reaching its conclusions through rigorous scientific methodology.

The Douma report also exposed Russia's repeated attempts to discredit and undermine the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to protect the Al-Assad regime from accountability. The reprehensible scapegoating of the White Helmets is aimed at deflecting attention. The White Helmets' life-saving work has been demonstrated time and again, including during the recent earthquake response.

It is also worth noting that today marks five years since two agents from the Russian military intelligence service carried out a chemical weapons attack in the United Kingdom, killing a British citizen and injuring others. It is therefore perhaps not just the Al-Assad regime that it is attempting to protect.

Douma represents the ninth attributed instance of the use of chemical weapons by the Al-Assad regime. Given that consistent pattern of behaviour, and without progress on any of Syria's outstanding declaration issues, we cannot exclude the possibility that the Al-Assad regime may use chemical weapons again.

As we said many times, the outstanding issues regarding Syria's declaration are neither academic nor historic. While Syria continues to fail to comply with its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention, its chemical weapons programme presents an ongoing threat to international peace and security. It is therefore

incumbent on the Security Council to continue to discuss the matter and to continue to bring pressure on Syria to cooperate with the OPCW.

Mr. Parga Cintra (Brazil): At the outset, I would like to thank Mrs. Izumi Nakamitsu for her briefing today.

I would also like to reiterate Brazil's solidarity with the peoples of Syria and Türkiye after the devastating earthquake that hit both countries last month. The Brazilian Government announced the donation of water purifiers and seven tons of nutritious dehydrated foods to the Government of Syria as part of the efforts to help to address the immediate needs of the affected populations. We express our deepest sympathies for their losses.

As we stated at the most recent briefing (see S/PV.9255), the events described by the most recent report of the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) are extremely serious and must be subject to a thorough and impartial analysis, in accordance with the Chemical Weapons Convention. While we have concerns about the process that led to the establishment of the IIT, as well as questions regarding the challenges that it faced in the implementation of its mandate, we acknowledge the gravity of its conclusions. Brazil has given the report due consideration in view of our unwavering commitment to the prohibition of the use of chemical weapons.

We condemn the use of any chemical weapons anywhere, by anyone and under any circumstances. Any use of such weapons represents a threat to international peace and security, in direct violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention. Brazil sees the use or threat of use of any weapon of mass destruction as incompatible with international humanitarian law.

Given the report's worrisome conclusions, we reiterate 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, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the Chemical Weapons Convention itself.

We express the hope that the Syrian authorities and the OPCW can engage in effective cooperation in order to clarify the incidents of the use of chemical weapons and to address the outstanding questions regarding Syria's declared chemical arsenal and its destruction. That cooperation is essential to closing the Syrian chemical file.

Mr. Hauri (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I thank the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Mrs. Nakamitsu, for her briefing.

Switzerland welcomes the fact that some members of the Declarations Assessment Team were able to visit Syria from 17 to 22 January. Those members carried out limited activities, including site visits and logistical and administrative exchanges with the authorities. We look forward to their report, which is due to be issued just before the next session of the Executive Council of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

Switzerland hopes that the visit might be the first step towards Syria's renewed and full cooperation with the OPCW. We wish to reaffirm our trust in the OPCW and all its missions, whose integrity and professionalism are beyond doubt. Like the 193 States parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention, Syria is obliged to accept OPCW-designated personnel and provide them with immediate and unhindered access and the right to inspect all sites. That obligation was explicitly reiterated in resolution 2118 (2013). It has been almost 10 years since Syria, at the unanimous behest of the Council, submitted its initial declaration to the OPCW, as a State party to the Chemical Weapons Convention. To date, 20 outstanding issues related to the declaration remain outstanding. We reiterate our request that Syria provide the required responses to the OPCW Technical Secretariat pursuant to the decisions taken by OPCW's political bodies.

Obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention have been repeatedly violated in Syria. In presenting the report of the OPCW Identification and Investigation Team on the April 2018 attack in Douma, which concluded that there were reasonable grounds to believe that the perpetrators of the attack were members of the Syrian Arab Air Force, the Director-General and IIT Coordinator reminded the Council of that last month (see S/PV.9255). Our collective security, of which the Council is the ultimate guarantor, is based on our firm and categorical opposition to the use and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, including chemical weapons. Therefore, Switzerland demands that those who were responsible for the chemical attacks in Syria be held accountable for their crimes.

More generally, our collective security depends on full respect for international law by everyone and in all situations. We therefore welcome the

cooperation between the OPCW and the United Nations International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism, which is an important step towards the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013) and the application of international law, encompassing responsibility and accountability. That includes, in particular, the Chemical Weapons Convention and the norms of international humanitarian law, the main goal of which is the preservation of a minimum level of humanity in armed conflict in order to save lives and alleviate suffering. In that regard, I would like to reaffirm our shared goal to prevent the use of chemical weapons by anyone, at any time and under any circumstances.

Ms. AlMatrooshi (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank Mrs. Izumi Nakamitsu for her briefing today. I would also like to reiterate the United Arab Emirates' firm position of rejecting and explicitly condemning the use of chemical weapons under any circumstances, by anyone, anywhere. Their use constitutes a flagrant violation of the provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention and international law.

In the context of our discussion today, I would like to highlight the following points. First, making tangible progress in this dossier requires the establishment of a constructive dialogue between the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and Syria. We emphasize the importance of abiding by the principles upon which the OPCW was established as a technical organization, including the principles of consensus and non-politicization. In that context, we hope that both sides will hold consultations as soon as possible, as we do not see any reason that would prevent them from doing so. We had also hoped that the report of the OPCW would have included more details on the visit of the reduced team to Damascus and any constructive outcomes of that visit. We look forward to seeing such details reflected in the upcoming report, which is expected to be issued at the end of this month.

Secondly, it is important to consider the threats of chemical terrorism, given the acquisition or use of such weapons by terrorist groups such as the Da'esh organization. It is unfortunate that the threats posed by Da'esh to the security and stability of Syria remain present and grave, as demonstrated by its recent terrorist attack in the eastern countryside of Homs, which led to the killing of 53 people.

In conclusion, the United Arab Emirates stresses the importance of making progress on the chemical weapons dossier in Syria, as well as on all the dossiers related to resolving the Syrian crisis.

Mr. Spasse (Albania): Let me start by thanking Mrs. Izumi Nakamitsu for her briefing.

The Syrian regime has used chemical weapons nine times — I repeat, nine times — against its own people, claiming hundreds of lives, including those of children. Every one of those nine incidents was independently verified by the relevant mechanisms of the United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). The most recent report of the OPCW's Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) concluded that there were reasonable grounds to believe that on 7 April 2018, the Syrian Air Force carried out a chemical weapons attack in Douma, killing 43 people and injuring dozens more. We fully endorse the findings of the IIT. We must see to it that the use of chemical weapons does not go unpunished. Our silence in the face of such abominable crimes could be mistaken as an incentive for their use. The message must be clear: impunity for the use of chemical weapons must not and will not be tolerated.

The 113th report (see S/2023/158) of the OPCW Technical Secretariat clearly confirms that Syria's initial declaration cannot be considered to be accurate and complete under the Chemical Weapons Convention and resolution 2118 (2013). Albania has expressed its concern about the continuing gaps and discrepancies in Syria's initial declaration and expects honest cooperation from Syria on the current 20 outstanding issues related to it. We deplore the non-cooperative approach of the Syrian regime with regard to the OPCW Technical Secretariat, which has been evident in all OPCW reports since 2021. There is no other solution than Syria's full and effective cooperation with the OPCW, in accordance with the Chemical Weapons Convention and resolution 2118 (2013).

We commend the OPCW's ability to respond to allegations of chemical weapons use in Syria, including through the work of the Fact-Finding Mission and the Investigation and Identification Team, and we take note with satisfaction of the OPCW's constant efforts to engage with Syria, including at the ministerial level. In that framework, we look forward to the meeting to be held between the Director-General of the OPCW and the Syrian Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates.

We also look forward to the findings of the visit to Syria from 17 to 22 January of the reduced Declaration Assessment Team, which was sent to carry out limited activities. We await with equal interest the results of the ninth round of inspections of the Barzah and Jamrayah facilities, which was conducted in September 2022.

In conclusion, Albania reaffirms its confidence in the OPCW Technical Secretariat and its professionalism, independence, impartiality and recognized technical expertise. We defend the OPCW Technical Secretariat against the deliberate and baseless attacks on its integrity and credibility. We must have full confidence in OPCW and United Nations mechanisms, and the Security Council must show unity in defending its personnel against baseless attacks and attempts to politicize their work.

Mr. Camilleri (Malta): I thank High Representative Nakamitsu for yet another insightful briefing.

Last month, the Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the Coordinator of its Investigation and Identification Team briefed us on the third report of the Team, which concluded in disturbing detail that there were reasonable grounds to believe that the Syrian Arab Air Force was responsible for the chemical weapons attack in Douma that killed 43 people and injured dozens more. That represents the ninth occasion so far that the OPCW and joint United Nations-OPCW investigations have concluded that Syria has used chemical weapons against its own people. Such acts are a violation of international law and are completely unacceptable.

Malta has full confidence that the report was drafted in accordance with the best practices of international fact-finding bodies and commissions of investigation, as well as the applicable OPCW procedures. We fully support the independent, unbiased and expert work of the OPCW and its Technical Secretariat, which play a vital role in the global prohibition on chemical weapons and in ensuring the complete elimination of all chemical weapons in Syria. Any unfounded claims aimed at undermining its credibility or questioning its findings must not go unchallenged.

Malta regrets that the Syrian authorities failed to grant access to the site of the Douma incident despite Syria's obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and resolution 2118 (2013). That follows an unfortunate pattern of behaviour by Syria on

the file. Resolution 2118 (2013) is clear in its decision that Syria should fully cooperate with the United Nations and the OPCW. It is regrettable that the Syrian Arab Republic has not yet provided various pending declarations and other documents that the Declaration Assessment Team has been requesting since 2019, and that the declaration submitted is still considered inaccurate and incomplete. Malta looks forward to the publication of the report of the Declaration Assessment Team in the coming weeks, following the Technical Secretariat's initiative to send a reduced Declaration Assessment Team to Syria to conduct limited in-country activities. We hope for progress between focal points so that the meeting proposed between the Director-General and Foreign Minister Mekdad can finally take place. We strongly encourage the renewed extension of the tripartite agreement between the OPCW, the United Nations Office for Project Services and Syria, which is due to expire on 30 June this year.

Malta underlines its full support for the universalization of the global norm on the prohibition on chemical weapons, underpinned by the Chemical Weapons Convention. There can be no justification for the use of those abhorrent weapons. In 2013, the Council unanimously decided that those responsible for the use of chemical weapons in Syria must be held accountable. The use of chemical weapons must not go unpunished. The only way to assure the world that Syria's chemical-weapon programme has been completely and verifiably eliminated is through Syria's meaningful cooperation with the OPCW and provision of the necessary assurances on its programme, in accordance with the Chemical Weapons Convention.

The Council must uphold its decisions and the norm against chemical weapons and hold Syria to its obligations under resolution 2118 (2013) and the CWC.

Mr. Hamamoto (Japan): I thank Under-Secretary-General Nakamitsu for her briefing.

First of all, Japan would like to express its full support for the impartial, independent and professional work of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and its Technical Secretariat. The use of chemical weapons should never be tolerated anywhere, at any time, by anyone, under any circumstances. Those responsible for the use of chemical weapons must be held accountable.

Japan welcomed the third report of the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) as a vital contribution towards uncovering the truth about the Douma incident.

The IIT concluded that there are reasonable grounds to believe that the Syrian Arab Air Force perpetrated the chemical-weapon attacks. Japan once again condemns the Syrian Government's use of chemical weapons as concluded in the report. While we appreciate the recent report submitted by the Director-General of the OPCW, it is regrettable that we have not seen concrete progress on the file, and the monthly report has once again confirmed that the declaration submitted by the Syrian Arab Republic still cannot be considered accurate and complete. We deplore the lack of progress in organizing a high-level meeting between the Director-General of the OPCW and the Syrian Foreign Minister, as well as the next round of consultations between the Declaration Assessment Team and the Syrian National Authority.

We welcome the recent visit by members of the Declaration Assessment Team to Syria as a first step towards meaningful engagement and consultation, and look forward to hearing the results of their activities, including their site visits and one interview. However, a reduced team without any technical consultations with the Syrian National Authority can never be considered sufficient. We would like to reiterate our call on Syria to guarantee full and unhindered access for OPCW staff. Furthermore, Japan urges Syria to engage in good faith with the OPCW Technical Secretariat and to provide all the documents required to resolve the outstanding issues related to the initial and subsequent declarations submitted by Syria.

The Security Council cannot be silent on one simple fact — Syria is not in compliance with its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention and resolution 2118 (2013). No member of the Council can tolerate any excuses for Syria's repeated obstructionism. Japan reaffirms its commitment to continuing to provide the necessary support to the OPCW and its Technical Secretariat in their efforts to hold the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons accountable and to realize a world without chemical weapons.

Mr. De Rivière (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Mrs. Nakamitsu for her briefing.

As we all know, we are here because the Syrian regime has used weapons of mass destruction against its own people. Independent investigations by the United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) have proved that it occurred nine times. A few weeks ago the OPCW published a damning report showing how the Syrian air force deliberately dropped two barrels of chlorine

on residential buildings, resulting in the deaths of 43 people. France again urges the Syrian regime to comply immediately with its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention. The regime must finally shed light on its stockpiles, because as we know, they have not all been destroyed.

We noted the limited deployment of OPCW teams to Syria last month and await the report that they will present. Syria has continued to obstruct the OPCW's work, in obvious bad faith. The lack of progress is frustrating, but the blame lies entirely with the Syrian regime. In that context, I would like to commend the independent, impartial and professional work of the OPCW. The Director-General provided a detailed and compelling briefing last month (see S/PV.9255). No disinformation campaign will hide the regime's guilt. Exposing the truth is essential to holding the perpetrators of those attacks accountable. There must be no impunity for war criminals. The fight against impunity is the foundation of the effectiveness and credibility of the prohibition regime. France will continue to work with its partners to that end.

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

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the three African members of the Council, namely Gabon, Ghana and my own country, Mozambique.

I thank the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Mrs. Izumi Nakamitsu, for her briefing on the status of the implementation of the elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme. I welcome the participation in this meeting of the representatives of the Syrian Arab Republic, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Türkiye. We take note of the third report of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Investigation and Identification Team, which was issued on 27 January 2023. In that regard, we would like to call upon all sides directly involved in the ongoing investigations to assume their responsibilities in collaborating with the Investigation and Identification Team in order to bring to light the common findings of its work so that, once the allegations are confirmed, their perpetrators can be held accountable and justice done for the victims.

However, we welcome the cooperation between the OPCW and the Syrian National Authority on the most recent mission of the OPCW's limited group of experts, which constitutes a further step towards

collaboration on the ongoing investigation and the full implementation of the chemical weapons elimination programme. It goes without saying that the involvement of all parties in good faith will allow for progress on the file, eliminating any differences that hinder further progress in the investigations.

The international community in general and the Council in particular must continue to be concerned about the potential re-emergence of, and increase in, threats of chemical warfare and must take urgent steps to accelerate action towards a world free of chemical weapons. As parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention and members of the Organization for the Prohibition of the Chemical Weapons, the A3 defends the principle of general and universal disarmament for all States and advocates greater commitment and the establishment of more partnerships among States on matters related to disarmament with a view to achieving international peace and security. The A3 collectively stands 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 all efforts to eliminate their production, storage or use. We reiterate our support for resolution 2118 (2013). To conclude, we urge the early closure of Syria's chemical weapons programme as an important part of our common goal of international peace and security.

I resume my functions as President of the Council.

I 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, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I also wish to thank your predecessor, the Permanent Representative of Malta, for her leadership of the work of the Council in February.

Yesterday the world celebrated the first International Day for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Awareness. That occasion reminds us of the importance of the efforts to eliminate weapons of mass destruction, the use of which constitutes a crime against humanity and has resulted in the worst tragedies that humankind has suffered. The most heinous of those incidents was the dropping by the United States of America of two atomic bombs on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan in 1945, which killed hundreds of thousands of people.

The International Day also reminds us of the first-ever use of chemical weapons in the Belgian town of Ypres during the First World War, which also killed tens of thousands of people.

On 19 March 2013, the Syrian Arab Republic witnessed the first use of chemical weapons, when terrorist groups fired a shell carrying toxic chemicals at the Khan Al-Assal area in Aleppo governorate, leading to the killing of 25 martyrs, most of whom were Syrian Arab Army personnel, and injuring 110 others owing to asphyxiation and fainting. That incident continues to be ignored by certain countries. Based on its commitment to disarmament and non-proliferation, the Syrian Arab Republic took a strategic and voluntary decision in 2013 to accede to the Chemical Weapons Convention. It was also one of the first countries to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and is also a signatory of the Biological Weapons Convention. We actively contribute to efforts to establish a zone free from all weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East. The Syrian Arab Republic has repeatedly expressed its categorical condemnation of the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anytime, anywhere and under any circumstances. It has cooperated with full transparency and openness with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and destroyed its entire chemical stockpile and production facilities in 2014. It has implemented all its obligations under the conventions I mentioned.

Syria has continued its constructive cooperation with the OPCW, as demonstrated in many ways, the most recent of which include the following. The Syrian National Authority submitted its 111th report on the activities conducted on its territory and received the reduced Declaration Assessment Team, which visited Syria in January 2023. During that visit, consultations were held between the two sides and many elements relating to a number of outstanding issues were discussed. The Authority facilitated visits to certain sites, the collection of samples and the holding of interviews with witnesses. The Syrian National Authority also facilitates semi-annual visits by inspection teams from the OPCW Technical Secretariat to the Scientific Studies and Research Centre facility, of which nine rounds have been conducted to date. The national focal point is ready to communicate with its counterpart in the OPCW to prepare for the high-level meeting between the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, the Chairman of the Syrian National Authority and the OPCW Director-General. We look forward to convening that meeting as soon as possible.

The Syrian National Authority recently provided the OPCW Technical Secretariat with pictures of the site where the two chlorine cylinders related to the alleged incident in Douma were destroyed. They were destroyed as a result of an Israeli aggression on the site confirmed by official Israeli sources, including Israel's Minister of Intelligence. Israel should be condemned and held accountable for that act, along with all of its other repeated attacks on Syria's sovereignty. That is the job of the Security Council, which is entrusted with maintaining international peace and security. Yet the Syrian National Authority's constructive and productive cooperation over the years and all the facilities it has provided to the various teams of the OPCW have been ignored. The fact that some countries have launched campaigns questioning Syria's initial declaration and falsely accusing it of failing to implement its commitments has also been ignored, and in many cases there has been a refusal to point to the positive results that have been achieved. All of those are clear indications of the extent to which the issue has been politicized and the Organization has strayed from the noble purpose for which it was founded.

The unprofessional reports of the Technical Secretariat, which are based on information with no credibility and do not follow the methodology stipulated in the CWC, have enabled some countries to use the OPCW as a platform to target Syria. That was clearly evident in the performative suspension of Syria's rights and privileges in the OPCW, which was done by setting up artificial time frames for unenforceable requirements, a situation that is without precedent in the OPCW's history.

Armed terrorist groups continue to coordinate with the White Helmets group, the arm of the terrorist Al-Nusra Front, to stage chemical-weapon incidents and accuse the Syrian Government of carrying them out. Information recently emerged that the terrorist organization Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham has been coordinating with the White Helmets to transport a number of plastic barrels containing chlorine among warehouses in rural Idlib. The fact that some countries continue to intentionally overlook the serious terrorist threat posed by terrorist organizations' possession of weapons of mass destruction creates serious risks for all Member States. That must be acknowledged and condemned, because immediate and serious action is needed to prevent such weapons from falling into the hands of terrorists.

In conclusion, it has become clear that the repetition of these discussions when there have been no actual developments that would justify them has trapped us in a vicious circle that is wasting the Council's time and resources. The persistent hostile approach of some countries and their attempts to influence public opinion and exploit these discussions for political purposes that are well known will not lead to any progress. The right way to deal with the issue means abandoning this mistaken approach and enabling the necessary work to be conducted without politicization. We call on the OPCW Technical Secretariat to engage neutrally and in good faith, and to respect the scientific interpretations provided by the Syrian National Authority on some of the issues under discussion. It is time to restore the technical nature of the OPCW's tasks and enable it to do its work with professionalism and impartiality.

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

Mr. Iravani (Islamic Republic of Iran): I congratulate Mozambique on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month and I also commend Malta for its successful conduct of its presidency in the month of February. We welcome the presence of Mrs. Izumi Nakamitsu, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, at today's meeting.

As one of the main victims of chemical weapons, the Islamic Republic of Iran strongly condemns the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere and under any circumstances. As with other weapons of mass destruction, the use of chemical weapons constitutes a crime against humanity and a flagrant breach of international law. That is the reason why our people will never forget how the Western countries supported the Saddam Hussein regime in its systematic use of chemical weapons against Iranians.

The Syrian Arab Republic has fulfilled its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention and continues to cooperate with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). Moreover, the Government of Syria regularly submits monthly reports to the OPCW Director-General, with the most recent submitted on 17 February, detailing activities on Syrian territory related to the destruction of chemical weapons and their production facilities. Between 7 and 22 January it also received a reduced team of the Declaration Assessment Team. However, we are deeply concerned about the exploitation and politicization of the

Convention and the OPCW, which has divided Member States and weakened the credibility and legitimacy of the disarmament machinery. The 27 January report of the Investigation and Identification Team, like its previous reports, was based on unauthorized sources and lacked the required legal conclusions, while also disregarding observations from the Government of Syria. Those faults must be addressed responsibly to ensure the integrity of the OPCW's reports.

We support constructive dialogue between Syria and the OPCW at the highest level, within a specific time frame, in order to resolve outstanding issues and finally close the file. The political approach to the Syrian file has been a failed strategy and has jeopardized the process for resolving the outstanding issues. Additionally, applying double standards will only distract from the technical nature of the discussions at hand. Any investigation must be impartial, professional, credible and objective, and should comply fully with the Convention's requirements and procedures.

Finally, continuing to convene monthly meetings on the Syrian chemical file in which some members repeat previous claims against the Syrian Arab Republic, despite the fact that there have been no new developments, is counterproductive and a waste of United Nations resources and the Security Council's time.

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

Mrs. Özgür (Türkiye): We too would like to thank High Representative Nakamitsu for her briefing.

It has been nearly 10 years since the unanimous adoption of resolution 2118 (2013). Last month, the Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) briefed the Security Council (see S/PV.9255) and subsequently submitted his 113th report (see S/2023/158), which demonstrates that outstanding issues in relation to the Syrian regime's initial and subsequent declarations persist.

As we heard from High Representative Nakamitsu today, the OPCW Technical Secretariat is still awaiting a response to its inquiries sent to the regime with regard to its chemical weapons production facilities and the unauthorized movement of chlorine cylinders used in the Douma attack in 2018. Owing to the identified

gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies that remain unresolved, the OPCW still cannot consider the Syrian regime's declaration accurate and complete.

We call on the Syrian regime to fully cooperate with the OPCW Technical Secretariat, submit pending declarations and documents and fulfil all its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention and resolution 2118 (2013). We commend the independence, impartiality and professionalism demonstrated by the OPCW's Technical Secretariat. We also welcome Technical Secretariat's efforts to deliver on its mandate by using new or alternative methods when faced with hurdles. In those efforts, the OPCW needs the support of the Security Council, not discouragement. We look forward to receiving detailed information on the outcomes of the limited in-country mission conducted by a reduced Declaration Assessment Team in January.

The investigations of the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission and the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) are important to establish the truth about chemical

weapons used in Syria. In its third report, released last January, the IIT concluded that the Syrian regime was the perpetrator of the Douma chlorine gas attack in April 2018. Therefore, the regime's responsibility has been established for nine chemical weapons attacks to date in the reports of the investigative bodies mandated by the United Nations and the OPCW.

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 of the United Nations and the OPCW to ensure accountability in Syria. Ending impunity is imperative to achieve lasting peace in that country. It is also our collective responsibility to the hundreds of innocent lives lost due to chemical weapons attacks in Syria. We cannot change the past, but we do have the power to change the course of the future for the people of Syria.

The meeting rose at 4.15 p.m.