



## Security Council briefing on the situation in the Middle East: Syria (Chemical Weapons), 7 February 2023

Malta Statement delivered by Her Excellency Ambassador Vanessa Frazier  
Permanent Representative of Malta to the United Nations, New York

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I thank the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu, Director-General Arias, and Ambassador Oñate, Chief of the IIT, for their insightful briefings today. I also reiterate 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 to assist in the recovery.

Malta underlines its full support for the independent, unbiased, and expert work of the OPCW and its Technical Secretariat. The OPCW, including its Investigation and Identification Team, the Fact-Finding Mission, and the Declaration Assessment Team, plays a vital role as the implementor of the global prohibition of chemical weapons and in ensuring the complete elimination of all chemical weapons in Syria.

Let me assure you, Director-General, of Malta's full confidence in the Organisation.

Since our meeting last month, the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) has published its third report, concluding that there are reasonable grounds to believe that the Syrian Arab Air Forces were the perpetrators of the chemical weapons attack in Douma on 7 April 2018, killing 43 people and affecting dozens more.



This represents the 9<sup>th</sup> occasion so far that OPCW and joint UN-OPCW investigations have concluded that Syria has used chemical weapons against its own people. This 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. This 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 have 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 looks forward to reading the next DAT report.



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

Malta firmly believes in the universalisation 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. This Council must uphold the international ban on the use of chemical weapons. Those who use these abhorrent weapons must be held accountable.

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