



**THE HIGH REPRESENTATIVE'S BRIEFING TO THE
SECURITY COUNCIL CONSULTATIONS ON SYRIA:
RESOLUTIONS 2118 (2013) 2235 (2015) and 2319 (2016)**

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Madam President, Distinguished Members of the Council:

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to brief you on the Syrian chemical file, undertaken in furtherance of Security Council resolutions 2118 (2013), 2235 (2015) and 2319 (2016). But I will do so with a heavy heart.

Since yesterday morning, I have been in close contact with Director-General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

I also met with the Chargé d'Affaires of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations.

Madam President

I will first brief the Security Council on the most recent reported use of chemical weapons, in Khan Shaykhun, in Idlib, Syria.

At this point, information is still coming in. Currently, details about the attack are not fully known.

According to the most recent media reports, a chemical attack may have caused the deaths of at least 70 civilians, with perhaps more than 200 injured.

Both the Secretary-General and the OPCW Director-General issued statements expressing grave concern about these reports and reiterating their condemnation of any chemical weapons use.

I have been in close contact with the Director-General since the first reports came in yesterday.

He informed me that the OPCW Fact Finding Mission is actively engaged in gathering and analysing information from all available sources and will be prepared to deploy a team at the earliest opportunity.

If confirmed, this would constitute the single largest chemical weapons attack in the Syrian Arab Republic since the attack on Eastern Ghouta in August 2013.

Reports have stated that the attack was carried out through an airstrike on a residential area.

However, the means of delivery of the alleged attack cannot be definitively confirmed, at this stage.

Reports have also indicated that the presentation of symptoms after the attack included respiratory problems, vomiting, fainting and foaming at the mouth, as well as miosis (pupillary constriction).

This was visible in videos on social media, said to have been taken at the scene of the attack.

During my discussions yesterday with the Chargé d'Affaires of the Syrian Arab Republic, he stated that his Government denied having used chemical weapons in this attack or any other attack.

Madam President,

Now, I would like to turn to my monthly briefing on work regarding the Syrian chemical file.

First, on destruction. For the last three years following Syria's initial declaration, all declared chemical materials and production equipment have been removed or destroyed. Four hangars and seven tunnels have been disabled.

One hangar and two above-ground stationary facilities remain subject to verification of their disablement.

This work is still pending, due to the prevailing security situation around these facilities.

For this work to be complete, the OPCW, Syrian Arab Republic and the UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS) extended the Tripartite Agreement until the end of this year.

Second, on the declaration assessment. For the past three years the OPCW has worked with the Syrian Arab Republic to assess and verify the declaration.

A number of outstanding issues related to Syria's declaration still remain open.

The high-level consultations between the OPCW and the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to address these unresolved issues will resume in The Hague in early May.

The first OPCW inspection at the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Centre (SSRC) took place from 26 February to 5 March.

During this inspection, OPCW inspectors took samples, which are being analysed by the OPCW-designated laboratories.

Third, on investigations into alleged chemical attacks. The OPCW Fact Finding Mission (FFM) is looking at a number of incidents that have taken place over the past several months. It is in the process of finalizing its reporting in some weeks.

Should any FFM report conclude that an incident involved or likely involved the use of toxic chemicals as weapons, it will provide the basis for the Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) to begin its work to attribute responsibility for their use.

The investigative capacity of the JIM is now operational. It is based in The Hague for the obvious need to work closely with the OPCW teams.

It will be fully ready to begin its work as soon as the FFM reaches its conclusions.

The political and other support structure of the JIM in New York is likewise operational, with a liaison presence in Damascus soon to be established.

As has been done in the past, I expect that all Members of the Security Council, and all Member States in a position to do so, will provide information and access to the FFM and the JIM in order to facilitate the collection of evidence and the establishment of facts.

Madam President, Distinguished Members of the Council,

The Secretary-General is deeply disturbed by the continuing reports of alleged use of chemical weapons in Khan Shaykhun and elsewhere in Syria.

The Secretary-General recalls that the Security Council repeatedly determined that the use of chemical weapons anywhere constitutes a threat to international peace and security and that the use of chemical weapons constitutes a serious violation of international law.

With this determination, the international community has made tremendous efforts, symbolized by three successive joint missions of the OPCW and the UN, to stop the impunity for chemical weapons use from growing any further.

Despite these efforts, however, it is profoundly disturbing to witness tragic consequences of the continued use of chemical weapons on innocent civilians.

We are grateful to the Security Council for addressing this issue with unity, including through the creation and renewal of the JIM.

On our part, we would like to reassure the Members of the Security Council that the OPCW and the UN Secretariats will provide every possible support to the work of both the OPCW FFM and the JIM, so that these missions will discharge their mandates in an independent, impartial and professional manner.

We look forward to the continuing deliberations and the guidance of the Security Council.

I thank you for your attention.