

A lack of substantial progress in Syria's chemical weapons declaration

Thank you Mr President and may I also start by thanking High Representative Nakamitsu for her briefing.

Mr President, we are disappointed that despite Council members making clear, month after month, the importance of resolving the outstanding issues in Syria's chemical weapons Declaration, the latest monthly report from the OPCW Director-General sets out again a lack of substantive progress by Syria.

The OPCW Technical Secretariat has been attempting to reach agreement on deploying the DAT to Syria since April this year. It received no response to its requests to deploy from May to June and had to postpone its visit until after the summer. Syria eventually agreed to the deployment of the DAT this month, but now we are told that Syria has refused a visa for one of the DAT members, contrary to its obligations under UNSCR 2118, yet again resulting in the DAT being unable to deploy. Whilst we welcome the OPCW's efforts nevertheless to advance discussions on Syria's declaration by inviting Syria to The Hague, we regret that the 25th round of consultations have been unable to go ahead in full, in Syria.

Sadly, this lack of cooperation on the part of Syria is not an exception. For example, the OPCW is still waiting for answers regarding the Schedule 2 chemical found at the Barzah facilities of the Scientific Studies and Research Centre in November 2018. It is still waiting for answers to questions regarding the unauthorised movement and destruction of cylinders relating to the high-profile 2018 Douma chlorine attack. And the OPCW Executive Council and its Conference of States Parties are still waiting for compliance with the measures in the Executive Council's decision of 9 July 2020 imposed following the IIT's finding that chemical weapons were used by the Syria in Ltamenah in 2017.

It is often alleged by Syria that we and other countries are using the chemical weapons file to punish them. But let me assure you, Mr President, the UK would like nothing more than to receive a monthly report from the Director-General confirming that all declaration issues have been resolved and Syria's chemical weapons programme has been verifiably destroyed.

We call on Syria to take this process seriously and take expeditious steps towards meeting its obligations in full under resolution 2118 and the Chemical Weapons Convention.