

At UN, panel probing chemical weapons use in Syria urges independence

6 July 2017 – Noting that its members are working in a highly politicized environment, the panel investigating the use of chemical weapons in Syria today appealed to the international community to allow it to complete its work in an independent, impartial and objective manner.

“We receive direct and indirect messages from many sides on how to do our work; my message again, please let us do our work,” said Edmond Mulet, the head of the three-member panel leading the Joint Investigative Mechanism on Chemical Weapon Use in Syria.

“We have a highly professional team,” Mr. Mulet told reporters at United Nations Headquarters, speaking alongside the two other members of the panel, Judy Cheng-Hopkins and Stefan Mogl. “We will present our findings based on fact and science.”

The Joint Investigative Mechanism, comprising the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons ([OPCW](#)) and the UN, is currently investigating the [4 April 2017 attack on the town of Khan Shaykhun](#). Images of that incident showed children struggling to breathe as a result of the possible use of sarin gas. Also being examined are the incidents in Umm Hawsh on 16 September 2016, where sulphur mustard may have been used.

Addressing the press following a closed-door briefing to the Security Council on the Mechanism’s [sixth progress report](#), the panel said that the starting point of the Mechanism’s investigation is the determination by an earlier fact-finding mission that a specific incident in Syria involved or likely involved the use of chemicals as weapons.

The Mechanism is now gathering all relevant information concerning the two reported incidents, and stressed the importance of feedback from the Syrian Government on flight logs, notes on movements and lists of people interviewed.

“We’re working with the Syrian Government on this, and hopefully we’ll be given the necessary tools to do our work,” Mr. Mulet said, encouraging any other government, organization or entity to share information about these incidents with the Mechanism.

He added that the three-member panel “absolutely condemns” the use of chemical weapons and is working to identify the purported perpetrators.

Findings are expected to be presented to the Security Council in mid-October, said Mr. Mulet.

‘Progress’ in Astana, ahead of Geneva talks

Also today, the UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, said

“progress” had been achieved in the latest round of international talks in the Kazakh capital of Astana which will contribute to supporting the [intra-Syrian talks](#) due to resume in Geneva on Monday.

The discussions in Astana – being held between the Syrian conflict parties and led by Russia, Turkey and Iran – have focused on de-escalating the violence and strengthening a ceasefire in Syria.

“We have tried already three times you know with the ceasefire in Syria in the last period of the last three years, so we really want to give a chance to what is being done here and we believe that [efforts have been producing progress](#),” Mr. de Mistura told the press.

There are also discussion about confidence-building measures, including humanitarian demining and the issue of detainees, abductees and people who disappeared during the conflict.

The UN envoy confirmed that a new round of the intra-Syrian talks would begin in Geneva on 10 July, and that the progress in Astana could lead “to some progress on the political side” during the talks.

There have been technical discussions and meetings, said Mr. de Mistura, bringing “some clarity” and “some form of unity” among the opposition.

He noted the G20 meeting in Hamburg, Germany, due to start tomorrow, would be “a good occasion” for world leaders to address the Syrian conflict.

Mr. de Mistura’s work is guided by UN Security Council resolution 2254 (2015), which endorsed a roadmap for a peace process in Syria, including issues of governance, constitution and elections.