

Nitrous Oxide: Home Secretary's Letter to the ACMD

Letter to the chair of the ACMD asking the council to conduct an updated assessment of the health and social harms of nitrous oxide.

Syria's breach of international obligations by using chemical weapons

Thank you, Madam President, and I join others in appreciating India's presidency of the Security Council and wishing you, Madam President, and your team the very best for your presidency.

I'd like to start by thanking Madam Nakamitsu for her briefing, but I have little to add to what I said one month ago. Syria has an obligation under the UN Charter to abide by the decisions of this Council in resolution 2118. And, as a member of the OPCW, it has an obligation to meet its commitments under the Chemical Weapons Convention. It has breached these obligations by using chemical weapons throughout the conflict in Syria.

In this month's OPCW DG report, there are further signs of Syria's failure to cooperate fully with the OPCW and its personnel.

We note with concern, for instance, that Syria has agreed only a three-month extension of the Tripartite Agreement with UNOPS and the OPCW, rather than the nine months requested, significantly impacting its ability to conduct its mandated activity. The Tripartite Agreement is often held up by Council members as evidence of Syria's alleged cooperation. This is actually evidence of Syria's failure to cooperate fully.

And there continue to be unjustified delays in agreeing to the next round of consultations with the OPCW Declaration Assessment Team, and in granting visas to Technical Secretariat staff, leading for the second time this year to a period when there is no Technical Secretariat presence at the Command Centre.

As we said last month, we hope the proposed meeting between the Director-General and Mr Faisal Mekdad will open the door to resolving these compliance issues.

We also hope it will contribute to progress on the increasing list of declaration issues, and will provide clarity on other open questions for the Syrian regime, such as on the unauthorised movement of cylinders relating to the high-profile Douma chlorine attack and their subsequent alleged destruction.

Madam President, I'd like to conclude by expressing my regret at the ongoing use of these meetings to call into question the OPCW's scientific, technical and independent findings. Those who do so claim to be protecting the OPCW and the Chemical Weapons Convention. The reality is that they are seeking to divert attention from the Assad regime's well-evidenced use of chemical weapons. In doing so, they themselves continue to undermine the Chemical Weapons Convention, the long-held norms against chemical weapons use, and the role and unity of this Council on such an important issue. There are questions to answer. But these questions are for the Syrian regime, not the OPCW. This Council should leave Syria in no doubt that we expect it to take expeditious action to resolve these questions and comply fully with its obligations.

Thank you, Madam President.

[Report by OSCE Chief Observer Ambassador Varga: UK response](#)

Thank you Chair. Thank you Ambassador Varga for briefing the Permanent Council and for providing a detailed report into the activities of your Mission. We are grateful to you and your team of observers for your ongoing efforts to provide the international community with impartial and factual reporting on the situation on the ground, especially given the challenges posed by COVID-19 which we note have been managed effectively.

Unfortunately, your Mission continues to also face restrictions imposed by Russia, limiting monitoring activities and the transparency that your Mission can provide. The UK remains concerned that your Mission is present at only two checkpoints along over 400 kilometres of the uncontrolled section of the Ukraine-Russia state border, outside government control. Our position on this is unchanged – this does not reflect the comprehensive monitoring of the border foreseen under the Minsk agreements.

Moreover, as your report details, the Mission's freedom of movement is heavily restricted at these two checkpoints and it is prohibited from using any observation tools, including binoculars or cameras. This creates unacceptable "blind spots" at both checkpoints where you are unable to monitor certain movements, including to assess whether vehicles are crossing in to Ukraine or not.

Despite these restrictions, the Mission continues to provide valuable reporting on the situation on the ground. Between 1 June and 17 August this year, 33 persons in military style outfits crossed from Russia in to Ukraine. In total during the reporting period, 766,428 people crossed the Russia-Ukraine state border, compared to 486,681 people during the same period last year. Despite the increased movement at these checkpoints, the Russia-backed

armed formations continue to use Covid-19 as a pretence for heavily restricting civilians' ability to cross the Line of Contact.

The Mission also continues to inform us about the so-called "humanitarian convoys". Since its deployment in July 2014, the Mission has reported 100 Russian convoys. In this reporting period, the Mission observed a Russian convoy consisting of four vehicles crossing into Ukraine from Russia via the Donetsk BCP on 12 August. These so-called humanitarian convoys cross without Ukraine's permission and therefore violate its sovereignty. The UK once again calls on Russia to cease this practice and to facilitate the safe delivery of international aid based on an agreed international mechanism, as foreseen under the Minsk agreements.

Given these valuable contribution the OSCE Observer Mission makes, the UK remains deeply disappointed that the Mission's mandate has not been extended for any longer than two months since May this year. Ambassador Varga, as your written report to the PC sets out, this poses significant administrative consequences for the Mission's staff, hampers the ability of staff to plan their professional and private lives and impedes the operational effectiveness of the Mission. We continue to call for the Mission to be given a longer mandate extension.

The UK commends the Mission for its ongoing work in these challenging circumstances. We will continue to support the work of this Mission. We join our international partners in calling on Russia to end all undue restrictions placed on the Observer Mission and to end its objection to the expansion of the Mission to the entirety of the uncontrolled section of the border. We also reiterate the importance of full, safe and unimpeded access for the Special Monitoring Mission to the entire territory of Ukraine, including the border.

I take this opportunity to reiterate the UK's unwavering support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders, including its territorial waters.

Confirmed cases of COVID-19 variants identified in UK

Latest updates on SARS-CoV-2 variants detected in UK.

Intensifying repression in Russia ahead of elections: UK statement

Thank you Mr Chair, and I am grateful to our US colleagues for putting this issue on the agenda today. There are a number of issues of importance to us all as OSCE participating States which give us cause for concern and which it is right to highlight in our discussion today.

The United Kingdom regrets the measures taken by the Russian authorities to repress civil society and silence independent media in Russia ahead of September's State Duma elections.

We have previously expressed our deep concerns about Russia's legislation on so-called "undesirable organisations" and "foreign agents", and the use of this legislation to target Russian civil society and suppress dissenting voices.

We condemn the authorities' designation of "Proekt" as "undesirable" and the designation of "Dozhd" and individual journalists as "foreign agents". These designations are yet another step in Russia's repression of independent media.

The expulsion of the journalist Sarah Rainsford is a retrograde step by the Russian authorities. We urge them to reconsider this action which can only do further damage to media freedom in Russia.

Furthermore, the designation of the independent monitoring organisation "Golos" as a "foreign agent" is unjustifiable. Again, we must draw our own conclusions on why Russia does not want its elections to be monitored by independent bodies. [As we stated on 5 August](#), the lack of true independent observation is against the interests of the Russian people and anyone who wishes to see democracy protected in Russia.

These actions are only the latest step in Russia's comprehensive efforts to limit political freedoms and civil society space.

Previously, we also expressed concerns that use of legislation signed into law on 4 June regarding so-called "extremist" organisations, was coordinated to preclude participation of specific opposition movements ahead of the start of the official pre-electoral campaign period.

The Moscow City Court's perverse ruling of Alexey Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation and political networks as "extremist" organisations, the criminal charges brought against Mr Navalny's associates and the sentencing of Mr Navalny's allies on COVID-19 related charges, form a deliberate attempt to outlaw genuine political opposition in Russia.

The Russian authorities' actions disregard the fundamental freedoms and human rights of Russian citizens, and contradict its human rights commitments.

Ahead of September's State Duma elections, we urge the Russian authorities to reverse these designations and to take all measures necessary to fulfil their obligations under the OSCE's human dimension and other international human rights commitments.