

Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the EU on the alleged chemical attack in Idlib, Syria

The EU condemns in the strongest terms the air strike that hit the town of Khan Sheikhoun in Idlib province on 4 April 2017, which has had horrific consequences, causing the deaths and injuries of scores of civilians including children and relief workers, with many victims displaying symptoms of gas poisoning.

The EU urges the United Nations Security Council to come together, strongly condemn the attack on Khan Sheikhoun and ensure a swift, independent and impartial investigation of the attack.

The OPCW's Fact Finding Mission (FFM) is in the process of gathering and analysing information from all available sources. While the investigation into this attack is ongoing, the EU is deeply worried to note that the Syrian regime has previously used chemical weapons in 2015, as identified in the August and October reports of the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism, and which the EU strongly condemned at the time. In this context, the EU reiterates that as a party to the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Syrian regime has explicitly obligated itself to refrain from the use of chemical weapons and that the Syrian regime has the primary responsibility for the protection of the Syrian population. The EU therefore calls on the regime's allies, notably Russia, to exercise appropriate pressure on the Syrian regime to this end.

The use of chemical weapons or chemical substances as weapons amounts to a war crime. Their use in Syria, including by the regime and Da'esh, must stop and identified perpetrators must be held accountable for this violation of international law.

Those guilty of violations of international law and the use of chemical weapons have to be sanctioned accordingly. In March, the EU added 4 high-ranking Syrian military officials to the sanctions list for their role in the use of chemical weapons against the civilian population, in line with the EU's policy to fight the proliferation and use of chemical weapons.

The EU will continue to support the efforts of the OPCW in Syria with regard to the investigation of the use of chemical weapons and considers that such efforts have to be continued in the future by the international community.

This attack constitutes a flagrant violation of the ceasefire. It underlines the urgent need for a real and verified ceasefire. The EU calls on Russia, Turkey and Iran to live up to their commitments as guarantors in this regard.

Attacks of this kind only reinforce the urgent need for a genuine political transition in Syria and the EU's will to support UN efforts to broker a

political solution to the Syrian conflict through the intra-Syrian talks in Geneva, as reaffirmed at the International Conference "Supporting the future of Syria and the region" that the EU hosted in Brussels on 5 April 2017.