

Ensuring the perpetrators of chemical weapons attacks in Syria are held to account

Thank you. Let me thank the Under-Secretary-General Nakamitsu for her briefing, and Director-General Arias for his continued thorough reporting.

Within the last month, the OPCW's Fact-Finding Mission has issued two reports, finding there are reasonable grounds to believe chemical weapons were used in Marea in September 2015 and in Kafr Zeita in October 2016.

Both incidents are cause for concern, indicating further use of chemical weapons in the Syrian conflict. We welcome the OPCW Technical Secretariat's professionalism and impartiality in compiling the reports, in which we have full confidence.

The United Kingdom opposes the use of chemical weapons in all circumstances, by all actors. There can be no impunity for those who use chemical weapons. We will continue to work with the international community to hold perpetrators of chemical weapons attacks to account.

Syria continues to fail to engage with efforts to resolve the many serious gaps and omissions in its chemical weapons declaration. Its defiant attitude shows its contempt for its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention and resolution 2118.

Disinformation about chemical weapons is worryingly familiar, coming not only from the Asad regime but from its backers on this Council. We have recently seen fake claims by the Russian Federation about impending chemical weapons attacks in Ukraine. Claims of imminent attacks by groups labelled as 'terrorists' or 'saboteurs' are put forward without any credible evidence, no doubt as part of the pretext for an invasion that the Russian Federation told us in this Council would never happen.

Russia has repeatedly alleged that the West supports 'false flag' attacks to frame Syria, charges that are never backed by evidence. Russia also claims the OPCW Technical Secretariat is biased, again presenting no plausible evidence.

Russia's tactics are designed to deflect attention from those who actually use chemical weapons. So far, eight separate attacks in Syria have been attributed to the Asad regime by independent, expert investigations run by the OPCW and UN. Further attacks remain under investigation.

Let me conclude by reminding you, and this Council, that any use of chemical weapons, by anyone, is abhorrent and cannot be tolerated.

Thank you.