

Russian operatives carried out Salisbury chemical attack alleges UK; accusations part of 'post-truth world' asserts Moscow

The United Kingdom and Russia traded a volley of words at the United Nations Security Council on Thursday, with the former laying out information which, it alleges, clearly places two Russian military intelligence operatives behind the deadly nerve-agent attack in the English city of Salisbury on 4 March.

The charges were categorically refuted by Russia, which instead accused the UK of trying to sow "anti-Russian hysteria."

Today's meeting, requested by the UK, follows evidence it released on its investigation into the Salisbury incident that left former Russian intelligence officer, Sergei Skripal, his daughter Yulia, and a local police officer, seriously injured. In July, two additional people living in the Salisbury area, were exposed to the chemical, and one of them died as a result.

The UK alleges that the deadly chemical is the Soviet-era nerve agent, Novichok. In April, the [Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons](#) (OPCW) agreed with that assessment.

UK Permanent Representative, Karen Pierce, told the Council that her country's investigation had identified two Russian nationals, who travelled under the names of Alexander Petrov and Ruslan Boshirov – both members of the Russian Military Intelligence Service (known as the GRU) – as those behind the nerve-agent attack and has issued international arrest warrants against them.

Ms. Pierce also said that the P5 – China, France, Russia, UK and the United States, the five permanent members of the Security Council – bear an important responsibility to uphold international law, especially against weapons of mass destruction.

"One P5 member has not upheld these important norms [...] and played dice with the lives of the people of Salisbury," she said, noting that her country has no quarrel with Russia but that the UK will "respond robustly when our security is threatened and the lives of our citizens are endangered."



UN Photo/Loey Felipe

Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia of the Russian Federation addresses the Security Council meeting considering the letter from the Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom to the United Nations.

No convincing evidence, says Russia

Forcefully denying and rebutting the investigation's findings, Russia's Permanent Representative Vassily A. Nebenzia said that the UK had not provided any convincing evidence relating to the Salisbury incident, but instead only lies concerning double agents, cyberattacks and military-grade chemical agents.

"I am not going to go through the list of this unfounded and mendacious cocktail of facts," he said.

Saying that Russia had offered to help the investigation, he said that "London has been refusing us this cooperation. London needs this story for just one purpose – to unleash a disgusting anti-Russian hysteria and to involve other countries in this hysteria," Mr. Nebenzia added.

Citing several inconsistencies in allegations levelled against his country, the Russian Permanent Representative said it remains impossible to know the real names of the suspects and therefore whether they are connected to the Russian Military Intelligence Service.

He claimed that the charges were yet another part of the "post-truth world" crafted by Western countries, he stressed, rejecting UK's sensational disclosures, as well as all unfounded allegations about his Government's involvement in the Salisbury events.

Several other Council members, including the United States and France, extended their support for the UK investigation and its findings, but the Bolivian Ambassador said that there needed to be restraint by Members,

warning against “slinging allegations” in the chamber, and calling for the use of diplomatic channels to ensure cooperation in resolving the dispute over the Salisbury chemical weapons incidents.

Haiti's security situation remains 'fragile': UN representative

Ms. Keita was presenting the [Secretary-General's](#) report, a review of the work of The UN Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH), the Government, and the UN country team and external partners, as the country prepares for the transition without a UN peacekeeping presence, scheduled to take place in October 2019.

Ms. Keita told the Security Council that several challenges remain, and dedicated action must take place to ensure the transition is a success.

These challenges, she said, include the violent [protests](#) that took place in July. These were sparked by a Government announcement of fuel price increases, and included widespread looting in the capital, Port-au-Prince, as well as in other cities.

In that instance, MINUJUSTH assisted the Haitian National Police in protecting the civilian population, and the crisis was quickly overcome. But the outbreak of violence, the worst seen in Haiti for several years, demonstrates the current volatility of the security situation, she intimated.

In addition, at a time when armed gangs continue to pose a threat, the number of police officers per 1,000 citizens has dropped to 1.32, and dedicated intervention is needed if the development plan of the Haitian National Police is fully implemented.

Several targets have not been met: a national action plan for human rights has not been implemented, a Permanent Electoral Council has not been nominated, and women are not represented in key state institutions. Ms. Keita added that progress hinges on the adoption and promulgation of key rule of law legislation, including the criminal code, and that these problems must be addressed by a fully-functioning Government.

MINUJUSTH, briefed Ms. Keita, has outlined a clear political strategy for the transition, working in close cooperation with international partners. Given the October deadline for the end of the UN's peacekeeping role in Haiti, she stressed that the Mission, country team, Government and other partners, will need to “redouble their efforts” to make up for the time lost because of challenges that emerged from the July incidents, and expressed her hope that the Security Council will continue to provide strong support.

Caribbean hurricane season 'will be different this time'

In September 2017 two category five hurricanes swept across the Caribbean, devastating island communities in the region. In the 2nd part of this special report marking the one year anniversary of hurricanes Irma and Maria hitting the Caribbean, UN News looks at how the UN has responded, helping communities to get back on their feet, and preparing them for the inevitability of more damaging hurricanes in the future.

Ahijah Williams, 15, has been taking disaster risk reduction training at school in Dominica ahead of the 2018 hurricane season. UNICEF Eastern Caribbean

15 year old Ahijah Williams is terrified by the idea of another hurricane season.

He is a student at North East Comprehensive School in Wesley, Dominica. He remembers how he felt when Hurricane Maria, a devastating Category 5 storm, ripped through his community 12 months ago.

"I was extremely horrified to hear those winds howling like wolves in the sky and houses flying away and people dying."

Although fearful of the dangers that the 2018 hurricane season could bring, he says he "would like to be more ready this time: prepare for the season, stock up on food, repair houses."

Dominica has been rebuilding its education system in the aftermath of Maria and preparing for the coming hurricane season. The European Commission provided the [UN Children's Fund](#), [UNICEF](#) – working with the Government of Dominica and IsraAID – with 500,000 euros to support the education sector across all 72 schools

The rebuilding has not just been taking place in the physical sense, but also in terms of preparing teachers and students to respond appropriately during a natural disaster like a hurricane.

Children evacuated from Barbuda during the 2017 hurricane season in the Caribbean received educational and recreational supplies from the UN Children's Fund. UNICEF/Manuel Moreno

"I want to learn how to prepare for a hurricane and what we do after a hurricane. It is my responsibility to help as a member of the Dominica Cadet

Corps,” says Ahijah. “I am looking forward to learning safe practices. It’s going to be different this time”

UNICEF also launched a “Return to Happiness” programme for the thousands of children affected by the hurricanes, helping them to work through their trauma using play, writing, drama and poetry.

Hurricane readiness

The people of Dominica are not alone. Across the islands of the eastern Caribbean, citizens, communities and governments are developing ways to improve their hurricane readiness.

And the UN is playing a major part in helping them to become more resilient, and better able to withstand the next season, as extreme weather events grow in frequency and scale.

The eastern Caribbean islands are no stranger to life-threatening weather conditions. The UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean ([ECLAC](#)) has identified the region as the second most hazard-prone in the world (after the Asia-Pacific region).

As well as hurricanes, inhabitants face threats such as floods and volcanoes, with regular annual losses from disasters estimated at \$3 billion per year. In its [2018 Caribbean Outlook report](#), ECLAC recommended that governments in the region improve resilience by undertaking recovery and reconstruction assessments.

Many families in Dominica lost everything they owned as a result of the hurricanes that struck the island in 2017. UNICEF/Manuel Moreno

Following the back-to-back batterings from Irma and Maria, Dominica has taken this message on-board. Shortly after the hurricanes, Dominican Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit said: “Our devastation is so complete that our recovery has to be total, and so we have a unique opportunity to be an example to the world, an example of how an entire nation rebounds from disaster and how an entire nation can be climate resilient for the future.”

To reach this goal, the Dominican Government created a task-force to determine best practice across every sector and enforce new disaster mitigation measures throughout the island.

The UN played an important role and, even in the very early days of the humanitarian recovery efforts, started planning for resilience.

The UN Development Programme, [UNDP](#), restored over 800 buildings for the most at-need people in Dominica and Antigua & Barbuda, trained hurricane-affected Dominicans to rebuild their own communities, and ensured that roofs were put up in accordance with improved building codes.

In addition, the UNDP looked at existing building standards and, where

necessary, reviewed them and raised them to bolster resilience. The aim is to enable Dominica to rebound from a Category 5 storm in a matter of weeks, rather than months or years.

UN disaster risk reduction

Adhering to building standards are key to improving the resilience of buildings in hurricane conditions. UNDP/Zaimis Olmos

Raúl Salazar, Head of the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction ([UNISDR](#)) for the Americas and The Caribbean says that preparedness in the region has improved over the last year: “With the contribution of the international community and cooperation among countries of the region, the affected islands have initiated a process of ‘risk informed’ recovery in sectors as diverse as education; with a safe schools perspective, where schools are able to resist the impact of hurricanes; tourism, with a strong engagement of the private sector to re-establish services; and the building of national disaster risk reduction plans.”

However, one of the big fears for the coming years, according to Raúl Salazar, is the unpredictability brought about by climate change: “Through changing temperatures, precipitation and sea levels, amongst other factors, global climate change is already modifying hazard levels and exacerbating disaster risks,” he said, adding that “climate change will contribute an additional \$1.4 billion to the expected annual losses from cyclone wind damage alone.”

Raúl Salazar’s concerns are echoed in the 2018 ECLAC Caribbean Outlook report, which predicts that “disaster-related costs are expected to escalate in the Caribbean in the face of population growth, rapid urbanization, increased exposure of assets and climate-change-related damage.”

UN [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) surveys the devastation in Barbuda caused by two category 5 hurricanes which swept across the Caribbean in September 2017.

UN Photo/Rick Bajornas

For the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, climate change remains an overriding factor in the devastation wreaked by hurricanes Irma and Maria. Speaking on a visit to Dominica and Barbuda shortly after the hurricane struck, he said: [“the intensity of hurricanes in the Caribbean in this season is not an accident. It is the result of climate change.”](#)

As more and more countries are affected, and the associated costs, human and financial, continue to rise the international community is moving towards meaningful action.

In 2015, the [Paris Agreement](#) was signed, committing all countries to undertake ambitious efforts to combat climate change. And, because reducing carbon emissions is no longer enough to halt climate change, States agreed to a [“Global Adaptation Goal”](#), strengthening the ability of the most vulnerable

countries to deal with its effects.

For more on Dominica's "war" on climate change click [here](#):

One of the crueller ironies of climate change is that, whilst they contribute less than 1 per cent to total greenhouse gas emissions, the [Small Island Developing States](#) tend to suffer disproportionately from its effects: just weeks after the hurricanes devastated his nation, Dominican Prime Minister, Roosevelt Skerrit, in an emotional [address](#), told the UN General Assembly:

"The stars have fallen, Eden is broken... We as a country, and as a region, did not start this war against nature. We did not provoke it. The war has come to us!"

[UN chief 'looks forward' to progress on denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula](#)

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has welcomed the North Korean leader, Kim Jong-un's commitment on Wednesday, to continue working towards the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

"The Secretary-General commends the continued momentum and efforts by both Koreas to further trust-building and [reconciliation](#), in line with the Panmunjom Declaration," his spokesperson, Stéphane Dujarric, said in a statement released on Thursday.

Mr. Dujarric added that the UN chief "looks forward to further progress at the inter-Korean summit later this month towards sustainable peace, security, and complete and verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, in accordance with relevant Security Council resolutions."

According to news reports, the Republic of Korea's national security adviser, Chung Eui-yong, said that Mr. Kim and South Korean President Moon Jae-in will meet in Pyongyang, the capital of North Korea (formally known as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, or DPRK) from 18-20 September, to discuss denuclearization measures – marking the first time that the North Korean leader has offered a potential timeline for fully dismantling his country's nuclear weapons programme.

UN Envoy working to 'overcome obstacles' barring resumption of Yemen peace talks

The United Nations [Special Envoy for Yemen](#) met Government representatives on Thursday at the start of what were due to be the first peace talks involving both warring parties to be held in two years, vowing to "overcome obstacles" which have so far prevented the Houthi rebel delegation from showing up.

Martin Griffiths met the delegation headed by Yemen's Minister of Foreign Affairs Khaled al Yamani, where, according to [a statement](#) issued by the Envoy, they discussed "the expectations of these consultations and relevant issues to the peace process, in particular Confidence Building Measures."

The Special Envoy thanked the Yemeni Government for "their positive engagement with his efforts to relaunch the peace process" and acknowledged the efforts made by them and the Saudi-led Coalition that is supporting their military campaign to oust Houthi rebels from the country, "to facilitate the convening of these consultations."

Fighting between the two sides which escalated in 2015, has caused a humanitarian crisis which has put nearly eight million on the edge of starvation, sparking the world's worst cholera epidemic and leaving the vast majority of Yemenis in need of aid.

According to news reports, the Houthi delegation was either unable or unwilling to leave the capital Sana'a to attend the consultations, and the Government has reportedly given a 24-hour deadline for them to arrive in the Swiss capital.

Mr. Griffiths reiterated the need to reach "an inclusive political solution to the conflict in Yemen. Yemeni people who live under dire humanitarian, economic and security conditions hope for a quick settlement of the conflict."

He added that he was "mindful of the challenges associated with bringing the parties together to Geneva, bearing in mind that they haven't met for two years" and said he was hopeful to see the Houthi delegates arrive.

"He continues to make efforts to overcome obstacles to allow the consultations to go forward," the statement concluded.