

Press release: Investigators from chemical weapons watchdog to arrive in UK

Independent investigators from the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) will arrive in the UK tomorrow to kick off their investigation into the nerve agent used in the attempted assassinations of Mr Skripal and his daughter in Salisbury on 4 March.

The team from The Hague will meet with officials from the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory and the police to discuss the process for collecting samples, including environmental ones.

These will then be despatched to highly reputable international laboratories selected by the OPCW for testing with results expected to take a minimum of two weeks.

This is the next step in the process to independently verify the analysis carried out by the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory at Porton Down. Last Wednesday, the Prime Minister wrote to the OPCW to formally invite them to verify the Government's analysis of the nerve agent used in the Salisbury attack. Subsequently the UK's Permanent Representative to the OPCW wrote to the Technical Secretariat inviting them to come to the UK to take a sample, under Article 8 of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

It reflects the UK's commitment to fully complying with the obligations of the Chemical Weapons Convention. On 12 March the Foreign Secretary summoned the Russian Ambassador and sought an explanation from the Russian Government, as Article 9 of the convention is clear we have the right to do. We received no meaningful response. It is therefore Russia which is failing to comply with the provisions of the convention. We should resist any Russian attempts to muddy the waters.

The Foreign Secretary revealed this morning that we have information indicating that within the last decade, Russia has investigated ways of delivering nerve agents likely for assassination. And part of this programme has involved producing and stockpiling quantities of novichok. This is a violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

The start of the investigation by the international chemical weapons watchdog comes as the Foreign Secretary travels to Brussels to brief foreign ministers from across the European Union on the attempted assassinations in Salisbury before meeting with the NATO Secretary General.

As the Foreign Secretary noted this morning, we have been encouraged by the international support we have received to date. More than 20 countries across 6 continents have expressed their solidarity with us and we will continue to work with our European partners and allies around the world to tackle the

threat posed by Russia to our collective security.

Background

- Novichok is a nerve agent, which meets the Chemical Weapon Convention's (CWC) definition of a chemical weapon, toxic chemical and precursor. Thus it is covered by the Convention's prohibitions.
- The chemical was positively identified by world-leading experts at the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory at Porton Down, which is one of the accredited and designated labs in the OPCW laboratory network.
- Russia is the official successor state to the USSR. As such, Russia legally took responsibility for ensuring the CWC applies to all former Soviet Chemical Weapons stocks and facilities.
- Members of the Convention must declare chemical weapons stockpiles and facilities and destroy Chemical Weapons within ten years of the convention coming into force for that party. In 1997, the Chemical Weapons Convention entered into force for Russia and solidified Russian commitments to chemical weapons disarmament and non-proliferation.
- Developing, stockpiling and using chemical weapons are all a breach of the Chemical Weapons Convention.