

Security Council must work towards 'common approach' as investigations continue into alleged Syria chemical attack

Experts continue to gather information related to an alleged chemical weapons attack in Douma, Syria, earlier this year, the UN's nuclear disarmament chief told the Security Council on Thursday.

Izumi Nakamitsu updated ambassadors on these developments and the implementation of a five-year-old Council resolution calling for the destruction of the country's chemical weapons programme.

A team from UN partner the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) has conducted on-site visits to Douma, located outside Syria's capital, Damascus, where 70 people reportedly died and hundreds more sought medical treatment after the suspected chemical attack on 7 April.

Ms. Nakamitsu said the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) published an interim report in July and Syria has provided comments .

"The FFM continues to collect and analyse information with regard to the alleged use of toxic chemicals as a weapon in Douma and will provide a final report on its findings in due course," she said.

The UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs added that the team is also analyzing information from Syria in connection with four reported incidents which occurred during July and November 2017 and are currently under investigation by the national authorities.

However, she expressed concern over the lack of a means to attribute responsibility for chemical attacks.

OPCW member states had issued a decision last June calling for "arrangements" to identify perpetrators in the event the FFM determines chemical weapons use had occurred in Syria.

"The closure of the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism, which was mandated to identify the perpetrators of such acts, emboldened those who have sought to carry out further attacks," she said. "Anyone who uses chemical weapons must be identified and must be held to account."

Ms. Nakamitsu underscored the Council's preeminent role in maintaining global peace and security, adding that the OPCW decision did not lessen the need for unity in the chamber.

"The Secretary-General has repeatedly expressed his willingness to assist

the Council, and I reiterate his calls for the Council to work together to find a common approach to tackle this issue, which has become one of the most critical challenges to the maintenance of international peace and security," she said.

The meeting was part of reporting in connection with a 2013 Security Council resolution on eliminating Syria's chemical weapons stock.

Ms. Nakamitsu recalled that last month, the Council learned that the OPCW had verified the destruction of all 27 chemical weapons production facilities declared by the Syrian authorities, which she called "an important step towards the full implementation" of the resolution.

"The complete implementation of resolution 2118 is critical not only for finding a long-overdue end to the ongoing conflict in Syria but also for stability in the region in the longer-term," she stated.