

Speech: The use of chemical weapons in Douma is an escalatory act.

Thank you Mr President.

And I thank the SRSB and Mr Markram for their briefings. And I thank him and through him all the UN teams on the ground for the important but incredibly difficult work that they do. As Steffan de Mistura said, this is an important Security Council session. My government shares the outrage that other colleagues have adequately described today. It is truly horrific to think of victims, families sheltering underground when the chlorine found them.

Mr President, it's the third time in five days that the Council has convened to discuss chemical weapons. This is dreadful in the true sense of that word. The Council should dread what we risk happening: that chemical weapons become a routine part of fighting. As a member of the P5, the UK believes that we have a particular responsibility to uphold the worldwide prohibition of the use of WMD. We agree with the Netherlands' Ambassador that the P5 has specific responsibilities.

Mr President, I believe that four members of the P5 do believe this, but there is one who does not. The Russian Ambassador referred to a resurgence of the cold war. This is not the cold war, Mr President. In the cold war there was not this flagrant disregard for the prohibitions that are universal on the use of WMD.

Mr President, the SRSB also referred to the risks of escalation and to international peace and security more broadly. We share his fears but it is the Syrian government, and its backers Iran and Russia, who are prolonging the fighting and risking regional and wider instability. There are real questions, Mr President, about what is happening in the T4 airbase with its foreign fighters and its mercenaries.

Mr President, we have been challenged today by our Russian colleague to say why we believe the attack was carried out by Syria and why we believe even that chemical weapons were used. The reasons, Mr President are as follows: The Joint Investigative Mechanism between 2014 and 2017, found six uses of chemical weapons. Two, it ascribed to Daesh for the use of mustard gas. Three, it ascribed to the regime for the use of chlorine and one further use it ascribed to the Syrian regime for the use of sarin, and that is the attack we talked about in the Council just last week on Khan Sheikhoun and which led to the US strike, which we support, on al Shayrat. In addition as the French Ambassador said we have had reports of Russian and Syrian warnings before the CW attack took place and of a pattern of helicopters, MI8 HIP helicopters flying overhead and these are reports that have come from the ground, Mr President.

I have listened carefully to the Russian Ambassador's arguments. As I have just set out, we as the United Kingdom, believe that the Syrian regime is

responsible for these latest attacks but there is one way to settle this Mr President, and this is to have an independent fact-finding mission, followed by an independent investigation. As we all know the fact-finding missions are there to determine whether chemical weapons have been used and if they have been used, what sort of chemical weapons. But it is only investigation that can determine who is responsible for their use and therefore start the path to accountability. I was very interested to hear the Russian offer that OPCW fact-finding mission could visit and would have the protection of Russian forces. Mr President, I believe that this is an offer worth perusing but it would of course be necessary for the OPCW mission to have complete freedom of action and freedom of access. That still leaves us, Mr President, with the question of who committed these atrocities and that is why we support the US text for a resolution and why we believe there is no legitimate reason not to support the call for this Council to set up an independent investigative mechanism. As I said before, Mr President, we have nothing to hide but it appears that Russia, and Syria, and their supporter Iran, do have something to fear.

Mr President, the Russian Ambassador singled out the UK, along with the US and France for some criticism so I would like to return to that. The responsibility for the cruelty in Syria belongs to Syria and its backers in Russia and Iran. The use of chemical weapons is an escalatory and a diabolical act. What Russia is trying to do, it strikes me, Mr President, is to turn the debate in this Council away from a discussion of the use of CW into a dispute between East and West, presenting itself as the victim. It is far too important, Mr President, to play games with the politics between East and West in respect of chemical weapons. Russia's crocodile tears for the people of Eastern Ghouta has an easy answer. It is to join us in a non-political attempt to get in humanitarian and protection workers from the UN to their job of looking after and mitigating the risk to civilians. Russia's concern at attribution for the use of CW also has an easy answer, Mr President, it is to join us in allowing the UN to set up an international investigative mechanism to pursue who is responsible. And I repeat here the two demands of my French colleague and I hope we will be able to make progress.

Mr President, I had not intended to address the Skripal case in Salisbury. But because my Russian colleague has done so I will address it today. He asked what were the similarities between Salisbury and Syria. I think it's important that I point out that the cases are different in the following respects. There is a thorough investigation underway in Salisbury. There is no investigation underway in Syria. The British Government in Salisbury is seeking to protect its people, as is its duty. The Syrian government, on the contrary, Mr President, again as we have heard today, attacks and gases its people. What the two do have in common though, and I am sorry to say, is Russia's refusal to assume P5 responsibilities to prevent the use of WMD and its reckless support for the use of WMD by its agents and by its allies.

Mr President, it is not us who want to alienate Russia, she alienates herself by not joining in the vast majority of this Council who want to find a non-polemical way through and address the use of CW against civilians in Syria.

The Russian Ambassador mentioned friends of the United States. Mr President, my government and our people are proud to be a friend of the United States. We stand with everybody on this Council who wants to find a way through the CW problem to have a proper fact finding mission and to have proper investigation as the first step to bringing this dreadful conflict to a close.

Thank you Mr President.