

Syria's breach of international obligations by using chemical weapons

Thank you, Madam President, and I join others in appreciating India's presidency of the Security Council and wishing you, Madam President, and your team the very best for your presidency.

I'd like to start by thanking Madam Nakamitsu for her briefing, but I have little to add to what I said one month ago. Syria has an obligation under the UN Charter to abide by the decisions of this Council in resolution 2118. And, as a member of the OPCW, it has an obligation to meet its commitments under the Chemical Weapons Convention. It has breached these obligations by using chemical weapons throughout the conflict in Syria.

In this month's OPCW DG report, there are further signs of Syria's failure to cooperate fully with the OPCW and its personnel.

We note with concern, for instance, that Syria has agreed only a three-month extension of the Tripartite Agreement with UNOPS and the OPCW, rather than the nine months requested, significantly impacting its ability to conduct its mandated activity. The Tripartite Agreement is often held up by Council members as evidence of Syria's alleged cooperation. This is actually evidence of Syria's failure to cooperate fully.

And there continue to be unjustified delays in agreeing to the next round of consultations with the OPCW Declaration Assessment Team, and in granting visas to Technical Secretariat staff, leading for the second time this year to a period when there is no Technical Secretariat presence at the Command Centre.

As we said last month, we hope the proposed meeting between the Director-General and Mr Faisal Mekdad will open the door to resolving these compliance issues.

We also hope it will contribute to progress on the increasing list of declaration issues, and will provide clarity on other open questions for the Syrian regime, such as on the unauthorised movement of cylinders relating to the high-profile Douma chlorine attack and their subsequent alleged destruction.

Madam President, I'd like to conclude by expressing my regret at the ongoing use of these meetings to call into question the OPCW's scientific, technical and independent findings. Those who do so claim to be protecting the OPCW and the Chemical Weapons Convention. The reality is that they are seeking to divert attention from the Assad regime's well-evidenced use of chemical weapons. In doing so, they themselves continue to undermine the Chemical Weapons Convention, the long-held norms against chemical weapons use, and the role and unity of this Council on such an important issue. There are questions to answer. But these questions are for the Syrian regime, not the

OPCW. This Council should leave Syria in no doubt that we expect it to take expeditious action to resolve these questions and comply fully with its obligations.

Thank you, Madam President.

Report by OSCE Chief Observer Ambassador Varga: UK response

Thank you Chair. Thank you Ambassador Varga for briefing the Permanent Council and for providing a detailed report into the activities of your Mission. We are grateful to you and your team of observers for your ongoing efforts to provide the international community with impartial and factual reporting on the situation on the ground, especially given the challenges posed by COVID-19 which we note have been managed effectively.

Unfortunately, your Mission continues to also face restrictions imposed by Russia, limiting monitoring activities and the transparency that your Mission can provide. The UK remains concerned that your Mission is present at only two checkpoints along over 400 kilometres of the uncontrolled section of the Ukraine-Russia state border, outside government control. Our position on this is unchanged – this does not reflect the comprehensive monitoring of the border foreseen under the Minsk agreements.

Moreover, as your report details, the Mission's freedom of movement is heavily restricted at these two checkpoints and it is prohibited from using any observation tools, including binoculars or cameras. This creates unacceptable "blind spots" at both checkpoints where you are unable to monitor certain movements, including to assess whether vehicles are crossing in to Ukraine or not.

Despite these restrictions, the Mission continues to provide valuable reporting on the situation on the ground. Between 1 June and 17 August this year, 33 persons in military style outfits crossed from Russia in to Ukraine. In total during the reporting period, 766,428 people crossed the Russia-Ukraine state border, compared to 486,681 people during the same period last year. Despite the increased movement at these checkpoints, the Russia-backed armed formations continue to use Covid-19 as a pretence for heavily restricting civilians' ability to cross the Line of Contact.

The Mission also continues to inform us about the so-called "humanitarian convoys". Since its deployment in July 2014, the Mission has reported 100 Russian convoys. In this reporting period, the Mission observed a Russian convoy consisting of four vehicles crossing into Ukraine from Russia via the Donetsk BCP on 12 August. These so-called humanitarian convoys cross without Ukraine's permission and therefore violate its sovereignty. The UK once again

calls on Russia to cease this practice and to facilitate the safe delivery of international aid based on an agreed international mechanism, as foreseen under the Minsk agreements.

Given these valuable contribution the OSCE Observer Mission makes, the UK remains deeply disappointed that the Mission's mandate has not been extended for any longer than two months since May this year. Ambassador Varga, as your written report to the PC sets out, this poses significant administrative consequences for the Mission's staff, hampers the ability of staff to plan their professional and private lives and impedes the operational effectiveness of the Mission. We continue to call for the Mission to be given a longer mandate extension.

The UK commends the Mission for its ongoing work in these challenging circumstances. We will continue to support the work of this Mission. We join our international partners in calling on Russia to end all undue restrictions placed on the Observer Mission and to end its objection to the expansion of the Mission to the entirety of the uncontrolled section of the border. We also reiterate the importance of full, safe and unimpeded access for the Special Monitoring Mission to the entire territory of Ukraine, including the border.

I take this opportunity to reiterate the UK's unwavering support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders, including its territorial waters.

Intensifying repression in Russia ahead of elections: UK statement

Thank you Mr Chair, and I am grateful to our US colleagues for putting this issue on the agenda today. There are a number of issues of importance to us all as OSCE participating States which give us cause for concern and which it is right to highlight in our discussion today.

The United Kingdom regrets the measures taken by the Russian authorities to repress civil society and silence independent media in Russia ahead of September's State Duma elections.

We have previously expressed our deep concerns about Russia's legislation on so-called "undesirable organisations" and "foreign agents", and the use of this legislation to target Russian civil society and suppress dissenting voices.

We condemn the authorities' designation of "Proekt" as "undesirable" and the designation of "Dozhd" and individual journalists as "foreign agents". These designations are yet another step in Russia's repression of independent

media.

The expulsion of the journalist Sarah Rainsford is a retrograde step by the Russian authorities. We urge them to reconsider this action which can only do further damage to media freedom in Russia.

Furthermore, the designation of the independent monitoring organisation "Golos" as a "foreign agent" is unjustifiable. Again, we must draw our own conclusions on why Russia does not want its elections to be monitored by independent bodies. [As we stated on 5 August](#), the lack of true independent observation is against the interests of the Russian people and anyone who wishes to see democracy protected in Russia.

These actions are only the latest step in Russia's comprehensive efforts to limit political freedoms and civil society space.

Previously, we also expressed concerns that use of legislation signed into law on 4 June regarding so-called "extremist" organisations, was coordinated to preclude participation of specific opposition movements ahead of the start of the official pre-electoral campaign period.

The Moscow City Court's perverse ruling of Alexey Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation and political networks as "extremist" organisations, the criminal charges brought against Mr Navalny's associates and the sentencing of Mr Navalny's allies on COVID-19 related charges, form a deliberate attempt to outlaw genuine political opposition in Russia.

The Russian authorities' actions disregard the fundamental freedoms and human rights of Russian citizens, and contradict its human rights commitments.

Ahead of September's State Duma elections, we urge the Russian authorities to reverse these designations and to take all measures necessary to fulfil their obligations under the OSCE's human dimension and other international human rights commitments.

[Yarm flood gates to be replaced after review](#)

The Environment Agency maintains 1.3km of flood wall in the town, which protects over 500 homes and businesses and is intersected with a series of public access and residential flood gates that maintain access to the river from public areas and some residential gardens, but can be closed if flooding is forecast.

The review, which was carried out to ensure the town's defences continued to offer the best possible protection for the whole community, started in

February and considered whether residential gates should be replaced or removed in favour of a continuous flood wall.

Simon Wilson, from the Environment Agency's Flood and Coastal Risk Management team in the North East, said:

Our absolute priority for this project has been to secure the best possible flood protection for Yarm. We considered various options such as providing new flood gates or replacing floodgates with walls, and how the different options would impact all local people.

Each of the residential gates located on an individual's property is unique, just like each of the homeowners' needs are unique, so we spoke personally with all of the affected homeowners to understand their requirements and discuss the operation of the gate on their property.

We have listened to residents and they have played a key role in helping us to make a decision which is right for the individual residents as well as the wider community.

Site investigation work is underway

Out of the 21 residential gates, 16 will be replaced on a like for like basis. The Environment Agency is still speaking with a small number of residents about potentially reducing the size of the gates on their property so they are more efficient to operate. One resident is open to their gate being replaced with a flood wall and discussions are ongoing.

Of the 11 public access gates in the town, nine will be replaced on a like for like basis with an improved design and new specifications making them more reliable and efficient to operate. Two do not need to be replaced.

Contractors for the Environment Agency have been in the town since early August carrying out some site investigation work, which will inform future design options for the new gates. Further updates will be provided to residents and the wider community when designs are complete.

Residents are encouraged to check their flood risk and take steps to [Prepare. Act. Survive – visit the 'what to do in a flood' page](#)

Those living in an area at risk of flooding are encouraged to download the Environment Agency's [simple flood plan](#) so you'll know what to do when there's a flood warning in your area.

Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) 64th session: UK statement on the future role of the Committee

Chair, Distinguished Delegates,

Please allow me to set out the view of the United Kingdom on the future role of COPUOS. As you know, the United Kingdom has taken a leading role on both the space sustainability agenda and that for space security. COPUOS has a crucial role in ensuring the ongoing sustainability of the space environment.

It can monitor the implementation of the Guidelines for the Long-Term Sustainability of Outer Space Activities and support countries.

It can set the international framework for safe space operations, listening to member states and their academics, companies and scientists.

It can support safe and sustainable space exploration; help address climate change; discuss peaceful uses of nuclear power sources in outer space; and encourage sustainable development, including achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

And it can, and does, look for ways to set new standards, regulations and rules to support new activities, such as for in-situ space resource utilisation.

These should ensure the space environment can be used by all nations to support their development and their socio-economic prosperity.

We will continue to be active in COPUOS, and in support of UNOOSA, to maintain a sustainable space environment. That includes the funding we provided for an LTS project on implementation, through the UN Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA).

But one thing COPUOS cannot do is to engage in discussions about threats to space systems from States. As you know, space systems include satellites, ground infrastructure and the signals and data that flow between these. States have developed and deployed weapons to target these space systems and to threaten the security of States.

But discussion of weapons is for the UN disarmament structures. COPUOS should not blur the lines with the disarmament community.

So the United Kingdom will continue to engage actively in discussions under the agenda item of Preventing an Arms Race in Outer Space at the Conference on Disarmament and the UN Disarmament Commission. And we will again run a resolution at the UN General Assembly First Committee on how responsible

space behaviours can reduce the risk of miscalculation and conflict arising from threats from States against our space systems.

Chair, let us not confuse these two very different strands of work and forums. One, COPUOS, looks to maintain space for all nations to use. The other, UN disarmament, seeks to prevent escalation and conflict that could arise from the use of weapons against space systems. They need to be dealt with separately.

Thank you.