



Security Council

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Letter dated 30 April 2020 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to transmit herewith the seventy-ninth monthly report of the Director-General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), submitted pursuant to paragraph 12 of Security Council resolution [2118 \(2013\)](#) (see annex). The report covers the period from 24 March to 23 April 2020.

In the light of the recent events related to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak, the OPCW Technical Secretariat continues to monitor the situation closely and will keep States parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction duly informed of the next developments. The Technical Secretariat intends to resume its activities, including those in the Syrian Arab Republic, as soon as practicable.

The Declaration Assessment Team continues its efforts to clarify all outstanding issues related to the initial declaration of the Syrian Arab Republic to OPCW. I note that on 21 April 2020 a letter was sent by the OPCW Director-General to the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Syrian Arab Republic expressing his appreciation for the commitment of the Syrian authorities to continuing technical consultations. The OPCW Director-General requested the Syrian National Authority to provide comments on the document containing the updated status of the outstanding issues and the proposed plan of action for their resolution.

With regard to the finding of a Schedule 2 chemical detected at the Barzah facilities of the Scientific Studies and Research Centre during the third round of inspections, in a note verbale dated 21 April 2020, the OPCW Technical Secretariat maintained that the explanations provided thus far by the Syrian Arab Republic remained insufficient.

The fact-finding mission continues to study all available information related to allegations of use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic. The mission is currently analysing information collected from recent deployments, is planning further deployments and will report to the Council on the results of its work in due course.

As conveyed in my letter dated 15 April 2020, the OPCW Technical Secretariat issued on 8 April 2020 the note entitled “First Report by the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) Pursuant to Paragraph 10 of decision C-SS-4/DEC.3 ‘Addressing the Threat from Chemical Weapons Use’ Ltamenah (Syrian Arab Republic) 24, 25, and 30 March 2017”, which I shared with the Security Council as document [S/2020/310](#). In view of the COVID-19 outbreak, the Team’s report will be considered by the OPCW Executive Council when the situation allows.



As I have stated previously, the use of chemical weapons by anyone and anywhere is intolerable, and impunity for their use is equally unacceptable. It is imperative to identify and hold accountable all those who have used chemical weapons. Unity in the Security Council is essential to achieve this urgent obligation.

(Signed) António **Guterres**

Annex

[Original: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish]

I have the honour to transmit to you my report entitled “Progress in the elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme”, prepared in accordance with the relevant provisions of OPCW Executive Council decision EC-M-33/DEC.1 and Security Council resolution [2118 \(2013\)](#), both dated 27 September 2013, for transmission to the Security Council (see enclosure). My report covers the period from 24 March 2020 to 23 April 2020 and also covers the reporting requirements of Executive Council decision EC-M-34/DEC.1, dated 15 November 2013.

(Signed) Fernando **Arias**

Enclosure

[Original: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish]

Report by the Director General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons

Progress in the elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme

Background

1. In accordance with subparagraph 2(f) of the decision by the Executive Council (hereinafter “the Council”) at its Thirty-Third Meeting (EC-M-33/DEC.1, dated 27 September 2013), the Technical Secretariat (hereinafter “the Secretariat”) is to report to the Council on a monthly basis regarding the implementation of that decision. In accordance with paragraph 12 of United Nations Security Council resolution [2118 \(2013\)](#), the report by the Secretariat is also to be submitted to the Security Council through the Secretary-General.
2. The Council, at its Thirty-Fourth Meeting, adopted a decision entitled “Detailed Requirements for the Destruction of Syrian Chemical Weapons and Syrian Chemical Weapons Production Facilities” (EC-M-34/DEC.1, dated 15 November 2013). In paragraph 22 of that decision, the Council decided that the Secretariat should report on its implementation “in conjunction with its reporting required by subparagraph 2(f) of Council decision EC-M-33/DEC.1”.
3. The Council, at its Forty-Eighth Meeting, adopted a decision entitled “Reports of the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission in Syria” (EC-M-48/DEC.1, dated 4 February 2015) noting the Director-General’s intent to include reports of the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission in Syria (FFM), along with information on the Council’s discussion thereof, as part of the monthly reporting pursuant to United Nations Security Council resolution [2118 \(2013\)](#). Similarly, the Council, at its Eighty-First Session, adopted a decision entitled “Report by the Director-General Regarding the Declaration and Related Submissions by the Syrian Arab Republic” (EC-81/DEC.4, dated 23 March 2016), noting the Director-General’s intent to provide information on the implementation of that decision.
4. The Council, at its Eighty-Third Session, adopted a decision entitled “OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism Reports on Chemical Weapons Use in the Syrian Arab Republic” (EC-83/DEC.5, dated 11 November 2016). In subparagraph 12(a) of that decision, the Council decided that the Director-General shall “regularly inform the Council on the implementation of this decision and incorporate information regarding the implementation of this decision into his monthly reporting to the United Nations Security Council, through the United Nations Secretary-General, regarding EC-M-33/DEC.1”.
5. This, the seventy-ninth monthly report, is therefore submitted in accordance with the aforementioned Council decisions and includes information relevant to the period from 24 March to 23 April 2020.

Impact of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19)

6. On 13 March 2020, the Secretariat informed the Syrian Arab Republic through a note verbale that, in view of the recent events related to the COVID-19 outbreak,

and in line with measures announced by the Dutch authorities, inter alia, the Director-General had taken the decision to postpone all scheduled deployments and missions of the Secretariat until further notice. This includes missions to take place in the Syrian Arab Republic.

7. The Secretariat continues to monitor the situation closely and will keep the States Parties duly informed of the next developments related to this unprecedented situation. The Secretariat intends to resume its activities, including those in the Syrian Arab Republic, as soon as practicable.

Progress achieved by the Syrian Arab Republic in meeting the requirements of Executive Council decisions EC-M-33/DEC.1 and EC-M-34/DEC.1

8. Progress by the Syrian Arab Republic is as follows:

As stated in previous reports, the Secretariat has verified the destruction of all 27 chemical weapons production facilities (CWPFs) declared by the Syrian Arab Republic.

On 17 April 2020, the Syrian Arab Republic submitted to the Council its seventy-seventh monthly report (EC-94/P/NAT.2, dated 16 April 2020) regarding activities on its territory related to the destruction of its chemical weapons and CWPFs, as required by paragraph 19 of EC-M-34/DEC.1.

Progress in the elimination of Syrian chemical weapons by States Parties hosting destruction activities

9. As stated in previous reports, all of the chemicals declared by the Syrian Arab Republic that were removed from its territory in 2014 have been destroyed.

Activities carried out by the Technical Secretariat with respect to Executive Council decisions EC-81/DEC.4 and EC-83/DEC.5

10. The Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) continues its efforts to clarify all outstanding issues regarding the initial declaration of the Syrian Arab Republic in accordance with paragraph 3 of Council decision EC-81/DEC.4 and paragraph 6 of Council decision EC-83/DEC.5.

11. In accordance with the decision of the Director-General to postpone all planned deployments and missions until further notice in view of the COVID-19 outbreak, the twenty-third round of consultations, initially planned to begin on 15 March 2020 in Damascus, will be rescheduled.

12. In its seventy-sixth monthly report regarding activities on its territory related to the destruction of its chemical weapons and CWPFs (EC-94/P/NAT.1, dated 18 March 2020), the Syrian Arab Republic expressed its readiness to continue technical consultations with the Secretariat on resolving declaration-related gaps, inconsistencies, and discrepancies, and accordingly stated that it would welcome further visits of the DAT.

13. In order to maintain engagement and activities ahead of the next round of consultations, the Director-General sent a letter dated 21 April 2020 to the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Syrian Arab Republic, H.E. Dr. Faisal Mekdad. In this letter, the Director-General expressed his appreciation

for the commitment of the Syrian authorities to continuing technical consultations, and shared a document containing an updated status of outstanding issues and the proposed plan of action for their resolution, as discussed in October 2019 during the twenty-second round of consultations. Furthermore, the Director-General requested the Syrian National Authority to provide comments to the aforementioned document and to submit the information requested therein at the earliest opportunity.

14. In accordance with paragraph 10 of Council decision EC-83/DEC.5, the Secretariat continues to assess conditions for the conduct of inspections at the sites identified by the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism in its third and fourth reports. Pursuant to paragraph 11 of Council decision EC-83/DEC.5, the Secretariat conducted the sixth round of inspections from 6 to 11 November 2019. The outcome of those inspections will be reported to the Council in due course. Further inspections will be conducted depending on the evolution of the COVID-19 epidemic and its impact on OPCW activities.

15. As previously reported, with regard to the explanation provided in a note verbale from the Syrian Arab Republic dated 7 November 2019 for the finding of a Schedule 2.B.04 chemical that was detected during the third round of inspections at the Barzah facilities of the Scientific Studies and Research Centre (SSRC), the Secretariat sent the Syrian authorities a note verbale on 20 February 2020 requesting additional information and proposing further activities to clarify the explanation. The Syrian Arab Republic responded in a note verbale on 12 March 2020.

16. In a note verbale dated 21 April 2020, the Secretariat maintained that the explanations provided thus far by the Syrian Arab Republic regarding this issue remain insufficient. As the presence of the chemical detected at the SSRC may also be considered as indicative of potentially undeclared activities involving nerve agents, the Secretariat requested the Syrian Arab Republic to undertake concrete steps that would ensure the timely resolution of this issue.

Other activities carried out by the Technical Secretariat with respect to the Syrian Arab Republic

17. As at the cut-off date of this report, one OPCW staff member was deployed as part of the OPCW Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic.

18. The United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) continues to provide support to the OPCW Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic in accordance with the Tripartite Agreement concluded between the OPCW, UNOPS, and the Syrian Arab Republic. This agreement facilitates the Secretariat's mandated activities in the Syrian Arab Republic pertaining to the full elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme, and to any subsequent decision or resolution of the relevant organs of the OPCW or the United Nations, as well as any bilateral agreements concluded between the OPCW and the Syrian Arab Republic. On 29 March 2020, the OPCW, UNOPS, and the Syrian Arab Republic agreed on a six-month extension to the Tripartite Agreement from 31 March to 30 September 2020 (inclusive).

19. Pursuant to EC-M-43/DEC.1 (dated 24 July 2014) regarding the destruction and verification of 12 declared CWPFs, the Secretariat has been monitoring and maintaining the remote monitoring systems installed at four sealed underground structures on the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic. The activities related to this mandate will be rescheduled in accordance with the decision of the Director-General to postpone all planned deployments and missions until further notice in view of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Activities carried out with respect to the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission in Syria

20. Guided by Council decisions EC-M-48/DEC.1 and EC-M-50/DEC.1 (dated 4 February 2015 and 23 November 2015, respectively), as well as by United Nations Security Council resolution [2209 \(2015\)](#), the FFM continues to study all available information relating to allegations of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic.
21. Regarding the incident of alleged use of chemical weapons in Aleppo on 24 November 2018, the Secretariat deployed to the Syrian Arab Republic three times to conduct interviews, visit hospitals, and to receive samples provided by the Syrian Arab Republic. Additionally, since May 2019, the Secretariat has made several requests to the Syrian Arab Republic and the Russian Federation to provide the information collected by the chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) specialists of the Russian Federation regarding this allegation.
22. In a note verbale dated 21 April 2020, the Secretariat reiterated its request to obtain access to the samples, analysis results, and other information collected by the Russian Federation CBRN specialists in relation to the Aleppo incident, and to be provided with names and given the possibility to interview the Russian CBRN personnel.
23. The FFM is currently analysing information collected from recent deployments, is planning further deployments, and will report to the Council on the results of its work in due course.

Activities carried out by the Technical Secretariat with respect to decision C-SS-4/DEC.3 of the Conference of the States Parties at its Fourth Special Session related to the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic

24. Decision C-SS-4/DEC.3 (dated 27 June 2018), adopted by the Conference of the States Parties (hereinafter “the Conference”) at its Fourth Special Session, addresses, inter alia, the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic.
25. Pursuant to paragraph 10 of C-SS-4/DEC.3, the Secretariat established the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) to identify the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic by identifying and reporting on all information potentially relevant to the origin of those chemical weapons in those instances in which the FFM determines or has determined that use or likely use occurred, and cases for which the OPCW United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism did not issue a report.
26. On 8 April 2020, the Secretariat issued a Note entitled “First Report by the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team Pursuant to Paragraph 10 of Decision C-SS-4/DEC.3 “Addressing the Threat from Chemical Weapons Use” Ltamenah (Syrian Arab Republic) 24, 25, and 30 March 2017” ([S/1867/2020](#), dated 8 April 2020).
27. In its report, the IIT concluded that there are reasonable grounds to believe that:
 - (a) At approximately 6:00 on 24 March 2017, an Su-22 military airplane belonging to the 50th Brigade of the 22nd Air Division of the Syrian Arab Air Force, departing from Shayrat airbase, dropped an M4000 aerial bomb containing sarin in southern Ltamenah, affecting at least 16 persons.

At approximately 15:00 on 25 March 2017, a helicopter of the Syrian Arab Air Force, departing from Hama airbase, dropped a cylinder on the Ltamenah hospital; the cylinder broke into the hospital through its roof, ruptured, and released chlorine, affecting at least 30 persons.

At approximately 6:00 on 30 March 2017, an Su-22 military airplane belonging to the 50th Brigade of the 22nd Air Division of the Syrian Arab Air Force, departing from Shayrat airbase, dropped an M4000 aerial bomb containing sarin in southern Ltamenah, affecting at least 60 persons.

28. In view of the circumstances related to the COVID-19 outbreak, on 8 April 2020 the Secretariat made available to all States Parties video statements delivered by the Director-General and the Coordinator of the IIT to introduce the report. On the same day, the report was provided to the Council and to the United Nations Secretary General, for their consideration, in a Note entitled “First Report of the Technical Secretariat Pursuant to Paragraph 10 of Decision C-SS-4/DEC.3 (dated 27 June 2018)” (EC-94/S/5, dated 8 April 2020).

29. Pursuant to paragraph 24 of decision C-SS-4/DEC.3, the next progress report on implementation of that decision will be submitted to the Council at its Ninety-Fourth Session, to be held from 7 to 10 July 2020. The IIT continues its investigations into several incidents where the FFM had determined that chemical weapons had been used or likely used in the Syrian Arab Republic, as indicated in EC-91/S/3, (dated 28 June 2019).

Supplementary resources

30. The Trust Fund for Syria Missions was established in November 2015 to support the FFM and other remaining activities, which presently include the work of the DAT and IIT, and the biannual inspections of the SSRC. As at the cut-off date of this report, total contributions to this fund stood at EUR 31.2 million. Contribution agreements had been concluded with Australia, Canada, Chile, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Monaco, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, the Republic of Korea, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America, and the European Union.

Conclusion

31. The main focus of the future activities of the OPCW Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic will be on the activities of the FFM; the implementation of Council decisions EC-83/DEC.5 and EC-81/DEC.4, including declaration-related issues; inspections at the Barzah and Jamrayah sites of the SSRC; and the implementation of Conference decision C-SS-4/DEC.3.