



Security Council

Seventy-sixth year

Provisional

8921st meeting

Wednesday, 8 December 2021, 10 a.m.

New York

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Abarry.	(Niger)
<i>Members:</i>	China	Mr. Sun Zhiqiang
	Estonia	Mr. Lipand
	France	Mr. De Rivière
	India	Mr. Mathur
	Ireland	Mr. Kelly
	Kenya	Mr. Ndung'u
	Mexico	Mrs. Buenrostro Massieu
	Norway	Ms. Juul
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	Ms. Prince
	Tunisia	Mr. Ladeb
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Eckersley
	United States of America	Mr. Mills
	Viet Nam	Mr. Pham

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Letter dated 30 November 2021 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2021/989)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Letter dated 30 November 2021 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2021/989)

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Syrian Arab Republic and Turkey to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2021/989, which contains the text of a letter dated 30 November 2021 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council.

I now give the floor to Mrs. Nakamitsu.

Mrs. Nakamitsu: I thank Council members for the opportunity to brief the Council again on the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013), on the elimination of the chemical weapons programme of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Since the previous Security Council meeting on resolution 2118 (2013), held on 11 November, the Office for Disarmament Affairs has been in regular contact with its counterparts at the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) on its activities related to this matter. Per established practice, I held a monthly call with the OPCW Director-General on 3 December to receive an update on developments and ascertain his views.

Additionally, the Office for Disarmament Affairs received information from the Permanent Mission of the Syrian Arab Republic concerning chemical weapons issues for this period. This information was studied carefully and also forwarded to the OPCW Technical Secretariat.

As I have previously informed the Council, the OPCW Technical Secretariat's ability to deploy to the Syrian Arab Republic remains subject to the evolution of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Despite continued travel restrictions, the Technical Secretariat continues to undertake its mandated activities related to the elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme and its engagement with the Syrian Arab Republic in that regard.

The OPCW Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) is persisting with its ongoing efforts to clarify all the outstanding issues regarding the initial declaration by the Syrian Arab Republic to the OPCW. I want to highlight that the Technical Secretariat's role is to assess whether explanations provided by Syrian experts for gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies in the Syrian Arab Republic's initial declaration are scientifically plausible. Once these assessments are conducted, the OPCW Technical Secretariat assists the Syrian Arab Republic in amending its initial declaration, as required, to ensure an accurate and complete declaration. I understand that the Syrian Arab Republic has submitted a total of 17 amendments and a number of supplements to its initial declaration. However, out of the 24 outstanding issues opened by the DAT in 2014, 20 remain unresolved.

The OPCW Technical Secretariat remains of the position that the Syrian Arab Republic must declare all types and quantities of chemical warfare agents produced and/or weaponized at the former chemical weapons production facility that was declared by the Syrian Arab Republic to have never been used to produce and/or weaponize chemical weapons. I have been advised that the OPCW Secretariat has not yet received the requested declarations from the Syrian Arab Republic.

I have also been advised that the OPCW Technical Secretariat has not yet received a response from the Syrian Arab Republic on requests for information and documentation regarding the damage caused to the declared former chemical weapons production facility during the attack on 8 June, nor has it received a response to the request for information regarding the unauthorized movement and remains of the two destroyed cylinders related to the chemical weapon incident that took place in Douma on 7 April 2018. In this regard, I call on the Syrian Arab Republic to respond to the OPCW Technical Secretariat as soon as possible.

Since April, the OPCW Technical Secretariat has attempted to schedule with the Syrian National Authority the twenty-fifth round of consultations with the DAT in Damascus. However, I regret to inform Council members that the OPCW Technical Secretariat has not been in a position to conduct that deployment, due to the continued refusal of the Syrian Arab Republic to issue all the requested visas to members of the DAT. I also regret to inform the Council that efforts by the Technical Secretariat to convene a limited meeting with Syrian experts at the OPCW's headquarters in The Hague in late October were unsuccessful.

As a result of the identified gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies that remain unresolved, the OPCW Technical Secretariat continues to assess that, at this stage, the declaration submitted by the Syrian Arab Republic cannot be considered accurate and complete in accordance with the Chemical Weapons Convention.

I reiterate my call on the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to facilitate arrangements for the DAT's deployment as soon as possible. As has been stressed on numerous occasions, it is only through the complete cooperation of the Syrian Arab Republic with the OPCW Technical Secretariat that all outstanding issues related to the Syrian Arab Republic's initial declaration can be closed. The confidence of the international community in the complete elimination of Syria's chemical weapons programme depends upon those issues being finalized.

I have been advised that the OPCW Technical Secretariat is planning for inspections of the Barzah and Jamrayah facilities of the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Centre (SSRC) in December. However, the inspections of those facilities remain subject to the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic. I am also advised that the Syrian Arab Republic has yet to provide sufficient technical information or explanations that would enable the OPCW Technical Secretariat to close the issue related to the detection of a Schedule 2 chemical at the Barzah facilities of the SSRC in November 2018.

With regard to the in-person meeting between the OPCW Director-General and the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Syrian Arab Republic, I note that the officials in charge of preparations continue discussing the date, location, agenda and composition of the delegations.

Consistent with previous updates to the Council, the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) remains in the process of studying all available information related to allegations of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic and continues to engage with the Syrian Arab Republic and other States parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention with regard to a variety of incidents. Further FFM deployments will be subject to the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic.

I understand that, following the issuance of its second report in April, the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) continues its investigations into incidents in which the FFM has determined that chemical weapons were used or likely used in the Syrian Arab Republic. The IIT will issue further reports in due course, subject to the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic. I take this opportunity to once again reiterate my full support for the integrity, professionalism, impartiality, objectivity and independence of the work of the OPCW.

As I previously informed the Council (see S/PV.8872), on 21 April the Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention, at its twenty-fifth session, adopted the decision C-25/DEC.9, entitled "Addressing the Possession and Use of Chemical Weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic", suspending the rights and privileges of the Syrian Arab Republic under the Convention. According to paragraph 8 of that decision, the rights and privileges of the Syrian Arab Republic will be reinstated by the Conference of the States Parties once the OPCW Director-General has reported to the Executive Council that the Syrian Arab Republic has completed all of the measures contained in paragraph 5 of Executive Council decision EC-94/DEC.2. I have been advised that the Syrian Arab Republic has yet to complete all those measures. I urge the Syrian Arab Republic to cooperate fully with the OPCW Technical Secretariat in that regard.

Before closing, I wish to echo the Secretary-General's message on the Day of Remembrance for all Victims of Chemical Warfare, commemorated on 30 November:

"Any use of chemical weapons is unacceptable and a clear violation of international law. Identifying those responsible and holding them to account is of paramount importance. We have a responsibility, particularly to the victims, to ensure accountability for the use of these heinous weapons.

“The United Nations supports all efforts to uphold the norm against chemical weapons, and to relegate these dreadful weapons to history.”

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mrs. Nakamitsu for her briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): As this is the last meeting of the Security Council on the Syrian chemical weapons issue this year, it is time to take stock. Unfortunately, the situation is far from encouraging and the root of the ongoing and newly emerging problems is not actually in Syria. The main source of disappointment is the constant attempts to politicize the work of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), which is leading us ever closer to destroying one of the most important pillars of the regime of non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. That is not at all what we are trying to achieve, but the erosion of confidence in the OPCW has taken on alarming proportions, no matter how much our Western counterparts try to convince us otherwise.

It is no longer possible to hide the fact that the OPCW Technical Secretariat, at the behest of certain States, is rubber-stamping one politically motivated report after another. Based on those reports, the governing bodies of the OPCW are pushing through discriminatory decisions against responsible member States, while the OPCW leadership plays along with those violations, avoiding a serious dialogue with member States that truly care about the fate and the reputation of the organization.

The recently concluded twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention was, unfortunately, a clear confirmation of these unseemly trends. Its culmination and main outcome was the fact that, for the first time in the history of the OPCW, a sovereign State that scrupulously complied with its obligations under the Convention lost its rights in the organization. That is a tremendous blow to the reputation of the OPCW and the entire chemical weapons non-proliferation regime. Its long-term consequences have yet to be understood, but the erosion of international confidence in the OPCW is already apparent.

In the light of the many significant and systemic violations, it is pointless to talk about the current report of the Director-General on the implementation

of resolution 2118 (2013) (see S/2021/989). Its main objective is to do whatever it takes, in spite of the facts and common sense, to make Damascus look bad. In that respect, it is not much different from all the previous reports of Mr. Arias.

Frankly, the situation at the OPCW has deteriorated so much that there is no guarantee that we will ever be able to get back to any kind of starting point in order to rectify the situation. For that to happen, the leadership of that organization would have to show the courage to acknowledge and correct the mistakes it has made. So far, however, it has not shown such willingness, only making matters worse. That is why, in the re-election of Mr. Arias, we distanced ourselves from consensus. However, we are continuing to work with him. We would like to hope that the OPCW leadership will draw the necessary conclusions from what is happening. In particular, we are counting on a reasonable and conscientious response to the concerns we have expressed in the Security Council. Specifically, exactly one year ago, we issued a list of eight questions about irregularities in the work of the Technical Secretariat (see S/2020/1202). At the time, the Director-General refused to answer them in an open session. We also did not receive any responses in closed consultations.

Six months later, in June, during another briefing by Fernando Arias (see S/PV.8785), we asked additional questions. Once again, we heard no answers on the substance. Instead, we received blatant disinformation and an outright distortion of the facts. For example, as we all recall, Mr. Arias deliberately distorted the essence of the note correspondence between the Permanent Mission of Russia to the OPCW and the Technical Secretariat with regard to the investigation of the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) to Douma, omitting the main conclusion reached in our note — that Russia insists on the staged nature of the incident in question because the findings presented in the FFM report (S/1731/2019) did not allow us to conclude that toxic chemicals were used as weapons. That is just one example. There were so many glaring inconsistencies and direct distortions in his responses that we were forced to respond by circulating our arguments as an official Security Council document. It should be no surprise, then, for me to note that it would be impolite to refuse to answer such questions, and we are going to insist on that.

Our primary concern, but not the only one, is the notorious FFM report on the April 2018 incident in Douma. As confirmed by various sources, including former inspectors of the OPCW who were directly involved in that investigation, the final version of the report was radically different from the original version, due to pressure from certain delegations. In other words, there was fraud. Attempts by those inspectors for the OPCW to investigate what happened came to naught. Instead, they were harassed for their search for the truth.

We know that the current leadership of the OPCW is fed up with this issue and is trying to hush up the matter in every possible way. Further evidence of that is the Director-General's refusal to involve the OPCW's Scientific Advisory Board to examine the Douma report matter. We are not convinced by references to the need for a new decision by the governing bodies of the OPCW for that to happen. The ability of CWC member States to ask the Scientific Advisory Board for an adequate explanation on issues related to the implementation of the Convention is stipulated in article VIII.

And yet, evidence of blatant manipulation and fraud in the preparation of the FFM report on Douma is only increasing. In particular, a number of media outlets have recently reported on a meeting between four representatives of the OPCW Technical Secretariat and leading German experts on chemical weapons in Germany in June 2018. It only took those experts one hour to conclude that the nature of the evidence and the symptoms of the victims in Douma did not fit the typical pattern resulting from the use of chlorine as a chemical warfare agent. Why were the conclusions of those German experts not included in the Technical Secretariat's final report on Douma? The answer is obvious — they did not fit with the version of events fabricated by the Technical Secretariat. The same fate befell many other opinions and evidence. The Douma report and its falsifications alone is a scandalous episode that some of our colleagues in the Security Council and the OPCW Technical Secretariat wish to forget, but it is just the tip of the iceberg. Those kinds of glaring inconsistencies and manipulations were characteristic of all previous reports on other episodes of the alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria — in Khan Shaykhun, Saraqib, Ltamenah and elsewhere.

We have also been unable to get clarification on Syria's initial declaration under the CWC. We have repeatedly asked Mr. Arias to explain why Damascus

has been singled out. Other countries with similar issues have not been targets of such a barrage of criticism. I note that despite joining the CWC under extremely difficult conditions of military and political instability and terrorism fuelled from abroad, Syria has nevertheless fulfilled all its obligations in good faith, as reported by the Director-General to the Security Council in June 2014 (see S/1191/2014). The final elimination of Syria's military chemical capabilities was confirmed in 2016 by the OPCW Executive Council and the Conference of the States Parties.

Contrary to Mr. Arias' claims, under the CWC, the Technical Secretariat has no right to apply complicated and politically motivated verification requirements to Syria. The very nature of the mandate of the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) does not envision any investigative powers; its task is merely to assist Syria in preparing its initial declaration. Nevertheless, in reality, the DAT, with a nod from the Technical Secretariat, has become a full-fledged inspection team, with self-appointed intrusive mandates. And dialogue with the DAT to assess the initial declaration is part of bilateral commitments undertaken voluntarily by Syria. I think our Syrian colleagues will be able to elaborate on their vision of engagement with the DAT and I urge one and all to listen carefully to what they have to say.

We remain very concerned about the Technical Secretariat's use of flawed methodology based on information collected remotely from biased sources, primarily the notorious White Helmets. That is a direct violation of the CWC, which has a chain-of-custody requirement to ensure that evidence is preserved.

There are other questions. For example, why has Mr. Arias never visited the Syrian Arab Republic to see the situation on the ground that he so confidently references in his reports? Such a visit is not only long overdue, but also an obligation of the head of the Technical Secretariat. Syria has extended an open invitation, and we do not understand what is preventing him from visiting the country, despite the explanation provided today by Mrs. Nakamitsu.

Unfortunately, all our attempts to engage in dialogue with the leadership of the Technical Secretariat have been stonewalled, and not only on the Syrian chemical dossier. We have also sought — in vain — answers from the Technical Secretariat on a number of key issues that are important for clarifying the events regarding

Mr. Navalny. So far, the Director-General of the OPCW has sidestepped us, just like our Western colleagues.

Overall, in view of the above, I believe that the Security Council has sufficient grounds to propose a dialogue with Mr. Arias in the near future, and we hope that he will be better prepared than in previous meetings.

Mr. Mills (United States of America): I would like to thank High Representative Nakamitsu for her informative briefing, as always. Let me say up front that the United States appreciates her efforts and the work of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in dealing with this extremely important issue.

Our Russian friend has thrown a lot of allegations and claims against the wall, many of which we have heard multiple times. I agree with our Russian friends that it is perhaps a good time to take stock. It has been eight years since the Security Council adopted resolution 2118 (2013), requiring the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons programme. In the years since that adoption, the Government of the United States and the majority of Council members have deeply regretted Syria's failure to uphold its obligations. We have regretted Syria's serious continuous and egregious disregard for calls from all of us and from the international community to cease the use of chemical weapons and fully disclose and verifiably eliminate its programme.

However, I sometimes think that our message of condemnation and outrage, although it is consistent and clear, often gets lost in the details. What gets lost is highlighting the impact of the violations on human beings — those who are victimized by such weapons and the lives that are lost as a result.

On 1 February 2018, the Al-Assad regime dropped chemical barrel bombs on its own people in the eastern Ghouta district of Damascus as part of a barbaric siege. On 7 April, that was followed by another attack, using at least two chlorine bombs, in which dozens of civilians were killed. Chlorine attacks such as those, as I think everyone around this table knows, burn the skin of their victims and cause fluid to fill the lungs as though the victim is drowning in the open air.

That forces us to consider for a moment the audacity of the Al-Assad regime — the repeated substantiated use of chemical weapons against the Syrian people, the retention of chemical weapons to conduct such attacks and the abject refusal to comply with its obligations

under the Chemical Weapons Convention and resolution 2118 (2013), but all while steadfastly denying the clear truth and, instead, trying to portray itself as a victim.

The United States sanctioned Tawfiq Muhammad Khadour, the commander of the 30th Brigade of the Syrian Air Force at Douma air base, for his role in those two attacks. Both the Al-Assad regime and its enablers, notably Russia, which tried to shield Syria from scrutiny, should know that the United States will continue to use all available tools, including sanctions, to promote accountability for the use of chemical weapons.

The United States estimates that the Al-Assad regime has used chemical weapons against the Syrian people at least 50 times since the conflict began. The use of those weapons is a serious threat not only to the people of Syria, but also to international security. However, as the April decision of the OPCW Conference of the States Parties reflects, and as High Representative Nakamitsu explained, Syria continues to flout its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention and resolution 2118 (2013). The Conference of the States Parties therefore decided to suspend some of Syria's rights and privileges under the Convention until, as we heard, the Director-General reports that the Al-Assad regime has completed certain measures, including declaring all its chemical-weapons facilities and any chemical weapons that it continues to possess.

The decision was clear as to what the Syrian regime needs to do to retain its rights and its privileges. However, since then, Syria has made no effort to fulfil such measures, and the regime's lack of cooperation has only worsened. We have seen the regime continue to deny, and delay, visas for OPCW personnel, resulting in unprecedented gaps in the OPCW Technical Secretariat's presence in Damascus, as well as infinite delays in the work of the OPCW Declaration Assessment Team.

The United States welcomes the extension of OPCW Director-General Fernando Arias's appointment to lead the Organization for another four-year term, as was approved last week by the most recent Conference of the States Parties. We believe that, under his able leadership, the OPCW has continued to carry out its impartial and independent work despite Syria's intransigence and obstruction and Russia's continued assault, frankly, on the OPCW in the Security Council. It is troubling that the Al-Assad regime's allies, including Russia, actively sought to block all attempts at accountability.

As we heard, Russia continues to spread disinformation about the use of chemical weapons in Syria, attack the integrity and professional work of the OPCW, impede ongoing efforts by responsible nations to hold the Al-Assad regime accountable for its use of chemical weapons and accuse Member States of politicizing what, in fact, are heinous atrocities. That pattern of enablement is both irresponsible and dangerous.

As long as the Al-Assad regime continues to perpetrate atrocities against its own people, peace in that country will remain out of reach. The United States strongly supports all efforts to ensure that resolution 2118 (2013) is implemented and to secure a political resolution consistent with resolution 2254 (2015).

Mr. Ndung'u (Kenya): I thank High Representative Izumi Nakamitsu for her comprehensive briefing.

Kenya reaffirms its principled position that the use of chemical weapons anywhere and by anyone constitutes a grave violation of international law. No cause can ever justify the use of any weapon of mass destruction under any circumstances.

Verification of the use of such weapons requires the institutions responsible for investigating such attacks, including the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), to diligently fulfil their role. We therefore reiterate our support for the mandate of the OPCW and the tremendous responsibility that it bears as the guardian of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Kenya also reiterates the need for the States parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention to continue to have confidence in the OPCW as the only technically competent international authority in its area of work. In that regard, the States parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention should work together to preserve the international norm against chemical weapons and the provisions of the Convention, along with its consistent and non-discriminatory implementation.

With regard to today's briefing, I re-emphasize Kenya's conviction that an expeditious closure of the investigations into the use of chemical weapons in Syria will allow the Security Council to support the Syrian people more meaningfully in their quest for lasting peace. We therefore continue to encourage cooperation and engagement in good faith between the Syrian Arab Republic and the OPCW Technical Secretariat, particularly regarding the identified

gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies that remain unresolved.

In conclusion, I reiterate that Kenya remains convinced that there can be no military solution to the situation in Syria, and I reaffirm our commitment to advancing a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process.

Mrs. Buenrostro Massieu (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank High Representative Nakamitsu for her briefing. We take note of the monthly report (see S/2021/989) of the Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

We note that, despite the repeated requests of the OPCW, the Syrian authorities have yet to provide all the information necessary to clarify the discrepancies regarding 20 outstanding issues in their initial declaration. My delegation reiterates that the task of the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) is to resolve those outstanding inconsistencies, which are also part of Syria's obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Given what I have just said, we call on the Damascus Government to fully cooperate with the DAT, including in promptly issuing visas, in order to ensure that all the officials of the Assessment Team can carry out the relevant on-site inspections. In addition, we recall that the appointment of experts as members of the OPCW fact-finding investigative delegations is the prerogative of the Technical Secretariat.

We also urge the Syrian authorities to facilitate the inspection of the two sites of the Scientific Studies and Research Centre in Barzah and Jamrayah, scheduled for December. Moreover, we again urge the competent authorities — without prejudice to condemning all violations of the Syrian airspace — to clarify the reasons why the chlorine cylinders related to the Douma incident of April 2018 were transferred without authorization.

We note favourably the extension of the Tripartite Agreement between the OPCW, the United Nations Office for Project Services and Syria for a further six months, although, as the Secretariat itself has stated, it would be preferable to have more time to effectively plan the functions and deployment of the teams.

Mexico welcomes the Member States that contribute financially to the Trust Fund for Syria

Missions, since without such support the work of the OPCW investigation teams would not be possible.

I express once again the full confidence and full support of my country's delegation to the OPCW, its organs and officials. I also reaffirm Mexico's condemnation of the use of chemical weapons by any actor and in any circumstance.

Before concluding, my delegation once again calls on the Government of Syria to cooperate with the OPCW and its investigative bodies. Mexico reiterates that the solution to the conflict in Syria must adhere to international law and the relevant resolutions of this Council.

Ms. Juul (Norway): I, too, would like to thank Mrs. Nakamitsu, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, for her briefing on the progress towards the full elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme.

Once again, the Council is meeting with regrettably few developments in the Syrian dossier. It is discouraging that this has been the overwhelming trend throughout the year. The Syrian Arab Republic must fulfil its obligations in accordance with the Chemical Weapons Convention and resolution 2118 (2013). Norway urges Syria to fully cooperate with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and provide sufficient technical information and explanations to close the 20 outstanding issues. It is critical that Syria complete the necessary measures in order to lift the suspension of its rights and privileges as a State party to the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Last week, the Conference of State Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention convened in The Hague. Fifty-six State parties, including Norway, expressed their grave concern regarding Syria's lack of cooperation with the OPCW and the Technical Secretariat. An important first step towards cooperation would be to resume regular deployments of the Declaration Assessment Team. Norway is concerned that the Team has not been deployed to Syria since February. Such consultations are important for ensuring consistent cooperation, exchange of information and providing technical assistance to Syria.

We welcome the six-month extension of the Tripartite Agreement between Syria, the OPCW and the United Nations Office for Project Services. This is an improvement compared to the previous extension of only three months. However, we take note of the

Technical Secretariat's need for a longer time span to be able to plan and implement its deployments effectively. We therefore encourage future extensions of the agreement to be of at least nine months' duration.

We must ensure that the international prohibition against the use of chemical weapons is upheld. Norway's confidence in the work of Director-General Arias and the Technical Secretariat of the OPCW remains steadfast, and we firmly reject any effort to discredit their important work.

Mr. Sun Zhiqiang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I think Mrs. Nakamitsu for her briefing.

China has reiterated its position on the Syrian chemical weapons issue on many occasions and has called for respect for science and facts, adherence to the technical attributes of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and avoidance of politicization. The investigation and handling of the alleged use of chemical weapons must comply strictly with OPCW requirements so that proper procedures and reliable evidence are used to reach credible conclusions.

Based on that position, China has always been concerned about the establishment and work of the Investigation and Identification Team. It is hoped that State parties will strengthen their dialogue, return to the tradition of making decisions by consensus and avoid repeatedly pushing for voting, which will further widen the differences among all parties.

With regard to the initial declaration and the arrangements for the twenty-fifth round of technical consultations, China calls on the Technical Secretariat to maintain constructive communication and cooperation with the Syrian Government. The most recent monthly report mentioned that,

"Due to the obstacles produced by the refusal, several times, to issue the visas requested by the Secretariat from the Syrian Arab Republic, the DAT has been unable to deploy to Damascus" (*S/2021/989, para. 16*).

That statement is not accurate. The Syrian Government asked that only one member of the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) be replaced and issued visas to other members, which should be objectively reflected in the report. Moreover, the Technical Secretariat cancelled the entire consultation because one member did not have a visa and stated that

it was not in a position to deploy the DAT. That is not helpful in resolving the problem and does not reflect well on the OPCW. We would like to know whether, in the cooperation between the State party and the Technical Secretariat, the former has no right to express concerns over visas? Has the Technical Secretariat considered the possibility of replacing one member of the Declaration Assessment Team?

China notes that, in its recent report to the Technical Secretariat, the Syrian Government reaffirmed its willingness to conduct technical consultations and resolve the issue of the initial declaration, which we welcome. We hope that the Technical Secretariat will remain open and flexible and work towards narrowing differences rather than increasing confrontation.

The Syrian chemical weapons issue cannot be resolved overnight. The relevant discussions are progressing slowly. Therefore, the Council's monthly deliberations is obviously too frequent. Serious consideration should be given to reducing the frequency of the deliberations. The monthly reports submitted by the OPCW are largely the same. China believes that they could be simplified, as appropriate, by focusing on providing new trends and information.

Mr. Lipand (Estonia): I thank High Representative Izumi Nakamitsu for her briefing today. During our two years of membership of the Council, we have very much appreciated her commitment and persistent calls for Security Council unity to uphold the norm against chemical weapons.

It has been eight years and 98 reports on the progress of the elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme. Progress on that file has been hard to achieve and only a few advances have been made over the years. As we heard today, out of the 24 issues opened by the Declaration Assessment Team, 20 remain unresolved. Those 20 do not represent minor issues or pure technicalities but involve the retention and production of unknown quantities of chemical weapons, chemical warfare agents and chemical munitions. As long as those weapons are not fully declared and destroyed, the possibility remains that they will be used again.

Those 20 unresolved issues also represent the Syrian regime's persistent attempts to obstruct and stall the work of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and its investigative mechanisms. Failing to issue visas and ignoring

the OPCW's requests for information and offers of assistance is a clear demonstration of Syria's lack of cooperation, lack of seriousness and lack of good will to comply with its international norms and obligations.

Unfortunately, that lack of compliance has sponsors. Over the past two years in the Council, we have witnessed a systematic disinformation campaign to discredit and sow distrust against the most competent organization in dealing with chemical weapons, solely because the OPCW has come to conclusions that are inconvenient for Syria and its protectors. Enabling Syria to retain and use chemical weapons and undermining the authority of the OPCW has serious consequences. We are allowing the norm against the use of chemical weapons to erode. We are allowing for setting in a new normal where chemical weapons are used to eliminate political rivals and punish the opposition. An alarming increase in their use have already taken place over the past years — in Malaysia, in the United Kingdom and, most recently, in Russia, with the assassination attempt of Alexei Navalny.

On 30 November, we commemorated the Day of Remembrance for all Victims of Chemical Warfare. According to the Syrian Network for Human Rights, more than 1,500 Syrians have been killed by chemical weapons, and more than 12,000 have been injured. A great majority of those victims were civilians, including women and children. The Syrian regime has repeatedly used chemical weapons against its people to spread terror, suppress opposition and force people to leave their homes and surrender. That has happened in Ghouta, Douma, Sarmin, Khan Shaykhun and elsewhere.

The OPCW's Investigation and Identification Team released two well-researched, evidence-based and impartial reports in 2020 and 2021 that attributed responsibility to Syrian Government forces for the use of chemical weapons. The great majority of the OPCW States parties reacted by condemning those acts and suspended Syria's rights and privileges under the Chemical Weapons Convention. With the exception of very few Syrian allies, support for the OPCW is strong, and the message is clear: the use of chemical weapons has consequences.

The next steps should be to ensure accountability. Resolution 2118 (2013) states clearly that those individuals responsible for the use of chemical weapons must be held accountable. The facts are there; the

evidence is there. What we need is political will, a sense of responsibility and Council unity. Impunity, tolerance and inaction cannot be an option when chemical weapons are used against civilian populations.

In conclusion, the use of chemical weapons presents a serious security threat to all States. Estonia condemns the use of chemical weapons in the strongest terms. We call on members of the Security Council and those that start their term next month to stand up for international law. It is important that the Council continue to discuss this important issue on a monthly basis until Syria's chemical weapons are declared and destroyed and accountability is ensured. Estonia will continue supporting the OPCW and fight against the use of chemical weapons, including outside the Council.

Mr. Ladeb (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to thank Mrs. Nakamitsu, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, for her briefing. I welcome the participation of the representatives of Syria, Iran and Turkey in today's meeting.

Tunisia reiterates its steadfast condemnation of the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere, in any circumstances and for any motives and justifications. It is necessary to hold the perpetrators of such atrocity crimes accountable. In that connection, we once again express our support for the mandate of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), whose duty is to independently and impartially investigate and verify issues, including in the Syrian Arab Republic. The OPCW provides a forum for consultation and cooperation among States on related matters.

We took note of the most recent report of the Director-General of the OPCW (see S/2021/989) pursuant to resolution 2118 (2013). We deplore the fact that the Syrian chemical weapons dossier is still at a stalemate and that there is no sign of the desired progress. These circumstances make it necessary for technical dialogue to resume between the Syrian Government and the Technical Secretariat, and for the Declaration Assessment Team to resume its mission in Syria in the context of an agreement between the two parties. In that regard, we hope to see a meeting between the OPCW Director-General and the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of Syria as soon as possible in order to discuss the way forward through a constructive and transparent dialogue based on mutual trust.

We urge for the definitive settlement of pending issues so that Syria can fulfil its contractual obligations. We also urge the OPCW to heed the concerns of the Syrian Government in its capacity as a sovereign State and a State party to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), leading to optimal solutions. It is obvious that that cannot occur without the resumption of direct dialogue, joint cooperation and coordination. We hope that forthcoming circumstances will allow for overcoming the obstacles imposed by the pandemic that have hindered the OPCW missions and teams in Syria so that they can resume their activities fully on Syrian territory, pursuant to their mandate. We reiterate that it is necessary to address constructively and comprehensively all obstacles and challenges that are blocking progress in the OPCW's investigations into using toxic chemical as weapons in Syria.

In conclusion, we emphasize once again that the efforts by the OPCW and the effectiveness of the ban on chemical weapons, in general, as well as the efforts by the Syrian Government, can be strongly supported by the coordinated efforts, constructive cooperation and consensual solutions of the Security Council and the international community at large, in order to monitor the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013) and the CWC, with a view to eliminating the chemical weapons threat, closing the Syrian chemical dossier and ending the crisis.

Mr. Eckersley (United Kingdom): I would like to thank Mrs. Nakamitsu for her briefing. We also thank Director-General Arias for his monthly report (see S/2021/989), and we congratulate him on his reappointment last week as Director-General, demonstrating the overwhelming support of the States parties to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) for his leadership. We also welcome the adoption of the OPCW's budget, which will ensure the ability of the Technical Secretariat, including the Investigation and Identification Team, to carry out its important disarmament functions.

This month's report demonstrates yet again how the OPCW has attempted to discharge those functions, while Syria has again failed to engage on process, let alone on substance. We regret that, due to Syria's repeated refusal to issue visas requested for the Technical Secretariat, the Declaration Assessment Team has been unable to deploy to Syria for many months.

As the Director-General observes in his report, the substance of the 20 outstanding issues on Syria's initial declaration are a significant cause for concern, among them the undeclared production and weaponization of toxic chemicals, including nerve agents, and the unknown whereabouts of significant quantities of chemical warfare agents and precursors.

The Syrian regime has been found by both the United Nations and the OPCW to have used chemical weapons on at least eight occasions during the conflict — and the actual number may be much higher, as we heard from others today. The outstanding issues therefore constitute an ongoing threat to international peace and security and a challenge to the Security Council's authority.

On 30 November, we commemorated the Day of Remembrance for all Victims of Chemical Warfare. We should take this moment to remember the Syrians killed and affected by chemical weapons attacks perpetrated by the Syrian regime and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. We cannot undo the damage done, but we can — and should — ensure accountability for the use of chemical weapons, and we can — and should — demand adherence to resolution 2118 (2013) and the verifiable destruction of Syria's chemical weapons programme.

Instead, significant energy is expended in the Security Council in spinning conspiracies and undermining the OPCW and the Chemical Weapons Convention, all to protect a regime at the expense of the Syrian people and international security. If that energy were expended in upholding Council resolutions and persuading the Syrian regime to meet its obligations, progress could perhaps be made towards resolving this issue. We therefore once again urge the Syrian authorities to take substantive steps to comply with its obligations, and we reaffirm our commitment to a Council united in ending the threat of chemical weapons in Syria.

Mr. Pham (Viet Nam): At the outset, I thank Under-Secretary-General Izumi Nakamitsu for her briefing. I welcome the participation of the representatives of Syria, Iran and Turkey at this meeting.

Let me start by reiterating Viet Nam's consistent policy of supporting the non-proliferation and disarmament of weapons of mass destruction, including chemical weapons. In that vein, my delegation unequivocally condemns the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere and under any circumstances.

Those weapons are indiscriminate and inhumane and can have long-term effects on human life and the environment, which can last for generations.

The full implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) is therefore a must. Such implementation requires, on the one hand, the States parties to fully abide by their obligations and, on the other hand, international cooperation, including assistance to and among those States. The role of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) is pivotal in that regard. As such, its work is also expected to be carried out in the most comprehensive, objective and impartial manner.

On the issue of chemical weapons in Syria, my delegation is concerned about the alleged uses of such weapons. Moreover, we also share the concern over the limited progress in the search for a conclusive solution to the issue. If our goal is to discuss the implementation of resolution 2118 (2013), it may seem unfulfilling for the outgoing elected members of the Security Council. We believe that the one and only reason for that is the trust deficit among the relevant parties and the long-standing divergence of the international community over the issue of chemical weapons in Syria. The most recent Conference of the States Parties to the CWC also demonstrated that.

In finding a long-term solution to this issue, it is important to renew trust in order to improve the working relationship between Syria and the OPCW Technical Secretariat. That can be achieved through constructive efforts and engagement by all sides. We look forward to the meeting between the Syrian Foreign Minister and the OPCW Director-General with a view to finding ways to break the ice.

Addressing the 20 remaining issues relating to the initial declaration, the first obligation of a State party under the CWC should be a priority. We therefore call for close, continuous and constructive engagement between the Declaration Assessment Team and the Syrian National Authority.

The full implementation of the CWC and resolution 2118 (2013) can be achieved only once it is supported by constructive and non-politicized international cooperation. The unity of the international community is indispensable to supporting the efforts of the OPCW Technical Secretariat and the Syrian Government.

In conclusion, Viet Nam would like to highlight the importance of investing in a comprehensive political settlement, in line with resolution 2254 (2015), that is led and owned by the Syrian themselves, facilitated by the United Nations, in full accordance with the principles of international law and the Charter of the United Nations. Such a political solution is the main key to addressing all outstanding issues and the only path towards sustainable peace and development for the Syrian people.

Mr. Mathur (India): Let me begin by thanking the Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Mrs. Izumi Nakamitsu, for her update today.

We have taken note of the contents of the most recent — the ninety-eighth — monthly report (see S/2021/989) of the Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), submitted to the Security Council pursuant to resolution 2118 (2013). We also note Syria's submission of its monthly report. We would like both the OPCW and Syria to work constructively to resolve the relevant issues expeditiously.

The Chemical Weapons Convention is a unique, non-discriminatory disarmament instrument for the elimination of an entire category of weapons of mass destruction. India attaches high importance to the CWC and stands for its full, effective and non-discriminatory implementation. We support collective efforts by all to ensure that the credibility and integrity of the Convention is maintained to the fullest.

India is against the use of chemical weapons by anybody, anywhere, at any time and under any circumstances. We have consistently maintained that any investigation into the use of chemical weapons must be impartial, credible and objective, scrupulously following the provisions and procedure embedded in the Convention and in conformity with the delicate balance of power and responsibility enshrined under it to establish the facts and reach evidence-based conclusions.

As a member of the Security Council, India has repeatedly cautioned against the possibility of terrorist entities and individuals gaining access to chemical weapons, including entities in the region. The most recent report of the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (S/2021/974)

also brought out those connections. Such linkages are a cause for concern and need to be acted upon.

Lastly, we believe that technical issues such as Syria's chemical weapons file need to be dealt in an objective manner. Progress on such matters could potentially help the political track move in a positive direction.

Mr. Kelly (Ireland): I thank High Representative Nakamitsu for her informative briefing today.

The continuing lack of progress on this file is a matter of serious concern for us. It is eight years since the horrific chemical weapons attack at

Ghouta, which killed hundreds of innocent civilians and caused lasting injury and suffering for thousands. The Security Council adopted resolution 2118 (2013) to make clear that the use of chemical weapons is utterly unacceptable and that no such attack should ever happen in Syria again. Unfortunately, as we know, and as the investigations by the United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) have confirmed, since then there have been numerous instances where those terrible weapons were directed against the Syrian people.

It is essential that the Security Council maintain its strong and clear message on upholding the international prohibition on chemical weapons and ensuring that they are never used again in Syria or anywhere else. Resolution 2118 (2013) is very clear as to what is required. No party, whether it be the Syrian authorities or non-State actors, can be allowed to hold, use, acquire or develop chemical weapons. Chemical weapons in Syria must be verifiably destroyed, to be confirmed by the OPCW. Syria must fully cooperate with the OPCW, accept personnel designated by the OPCW in the course of its work and provide immediate and unfettered access. Those responsible for the use of chemical weapons in Syria should be held accountable. That is what the international community agreed, and those are the obligations on us, as well as Syria.

As resolution 2118 (2013) highlights, the OPCW is an essential partner in achieving those ends. It is vital that the Council continue to give full backing to the OPCW in its ongoing work on all aspects of the Syrian chemical weapons file. We should all respect the integrity and professionalism that the OPCW has shown in carrying out its mandate and reject efforts to undermine that work for political ends.

It is in that context that we support the proposed bilateral meeting between Director-General Arias and Minister Mekdad. We hope that arrangements for the meeting will soon be finalized. It is important that this be a frank and meaningful discussion aimed at resolving the impasse and ensuring that real progress can be made on all the outstanding issues.

Let me conclude by underlining that the resolution of this file ultimately lies in the hands of the Syrian authorities. As others have said, Syria must respect its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and resolution 2118 (2013) and engage substantively with the OPCW. It should take immediate steps to lift its blockage of the deployment of the Declaration Assessment Team and to resolve the significant outstanding issues with its initial declaration.

It is only through Syria's serious and meaningful cooperation with the OPCW that we can be assured that its entire stock of chemical weapons is declared and verifiably destroyed, in line with its obligations under the CWC and resolution 2118 (2013). All of us want to see a resolution to this file, and Ireland will continue to support all efforts to this end.

Mr. De Rivière (France) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I thank Mrs. Nakamitsu for her briefing.

The Syrian regime refuses to cooperate. The Technical Secretariat of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) has been trying to organize the twenty-fifth round of consultations in Damascus for more than six months now, without success. Syria refuses to issue the necessary visas and is blocking deployments. The Declaration Assessment Team has still not been able to reach the site on the ground. The regime is deliberately and resolutely determined to obstruct. This is not acceptable.

Syria has cooperation obligations, enshrined in the Chemical Weapons Convention and in resolution 2118 (2013). It must respect them. The Technical Secretariat called Syria to order on 10 November. We once again salute the tenacity, professionalism and independence with which the Technical Secretariat is pursuing its mission. I take this opportunity to welcome the reappointment of Director-General Fernando Arias to his functions for another four years. I assure him of France's full support and confidence.

We have yet to receive any explanation for the relocation and destruction of the chlorine cylinders linked to the Douma attacks. We once again call on Syria to respond to the questions posed by the Technical Secretariat. At the initiative of France, the Conference of the States Parties took the decision to strip Syria of some of its rights and privileges. That decision is reversible, but the regime must cooperate. There is no other way. The first step for the regime is to finally shed light on the 20 outstanding issues related to its initial declaration.

On all these subjects, dialogue must be restored. We welcome the readiness of the OPCW Director-General to meet with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Syrian regime. We hope that the designation of contact points will facilitate the organization of that meeting.

Ms. Prince (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines): I too thank Under-Secretary-General Nakamitsu for her usual informative briefing.

To begin, I will reiterate Saint Vincent and the Grenadines' well-established position that the use of chemical weapons anywhere, by anyone and under any circumstances constitutes an abominable violation of international law. Chemical weapons do not discriminate between combatants and civilians and their effects are horrifying. Chemical-weapon atrocities cannot be ignored, and impunity cannot be encouraged through inaction. Perpetrators must be held accountable. The development and use of chemical weapons undoubtedly remain a threat to international peace and security.

Accordingly, all allegations of the use of these reprehensible weapons ought to be given immediate attention and investigations must be comprehensive, impartial, transparent and in keeping with international best practices. As such, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) bears a great responsibility as the implementing body of the Chemical Weapons Convention. Its findings must be capable of withstanding rigorous scrutiny to promote and sustain international cooperation. The Organization must therefore be free of politicization. Furthermore, the Conference of the State Parties should pursue, as far as is possible, consensus-based decisions and make efforts to prevent polarization and divisiveness among States parties.

We deeply regret and remain concerned by the continued long-term lack of movement on this dossier. For far too long, the gaps, inconsistencies and

discrepancies in the initial declaration have remained unresolved. Yet, we are hopeful that dialogue between the parties will cultivate a spirit of cooperation to make much-needed progress on all issues, including those related to the approval of visas for OPCW personnel. For this reason, we believe that the in-person meeting between the OPCW Director-General and the Syrian Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates is necessary and will assist in finding common ground and a constructive way forward. It should therefore be prioritized.

We welcome the agreement on the extension of the Tripartite Agreement between the OPCW, the United Nations Office for Project Services and the Syrian Arab Republic. This is demonstrative of the type of cooperation and positive engagement needed in every aspect of this file.

We reaffirm our unwavering support for the OPCW mandate. The organization must remain committed to being a well-functioning multilateral body and to upholding its own high standards, which merited the award of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2013. Likewise, the international community must remain committed to achieving the collective vision of a world free of chemical weapons. As such, political quarrels must be set aside, and we must unite to ensure that applied science and technology are used only for peace, progress and prosperity of all humankind.

The President (*spoke in French*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the Niger.

I thank Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu for her briefing.

Adherence to the Convention on the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons is almost universal, with nearly 190 States parties, including my country, the Niger. That is clearly because we are all aware of the deadly nature and enormous suffering that these weapons can inflict on people, especially when they fall into the hands of malicious individuals.

That is why, in 2013, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2118 (2013). It is regrettable to note that, since 2013, the efforts undertaken by the United Nations to identify responsibilities in the multiple cases of the use of chemical weapons in Syria have not made it possible to identify, in a way that is acceptable to all, responsibility for the atrocities committed.

My delegation categorically condemns any use of chemical weapons, whether in the Syrian crisis or elsewhere. The use of these weapons cannot be justified under any pretext or circumstance.

Today, as this is the last time my delegation will take the floor on the issue of chemical weapons in Syria — which, incidentally, has always reflected the divergent positions within the Council, I would like to reiterate the following points.

Only a continued and frank dialogue between the Secretariat of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the Government of Syria could help to resolve the issue of the initial declaration and ultimately advance the work of the Declaration Assessment Team. The Niger takes note of the continued efforts of the Syrian Government to shed light on the use of these weapons on its territory through its communications to the OPCW and the Security Council.

The issue of the use of chemical weapons is so crucial that it must be isolated from any unjustified delays or antagonism. It is also high time for Syria and the OPCW — and let me be clear, with the Council's unanimous support — work together to bring their positions closer together. If they fail to do so the status quo will persist and will lead us further away from ascertaining the truth and, therefore, accountability.

Any interpretation or exploitation of the dossier that does not seek to lead the Council to the full implementation of resolution 2118 (2013) must also be avoided, as these documents could serve as a basis for attributing responsibility and opening the way to possible prosecution before the courts. In that regard, it is important that the OPCW remain a technical body, as that is the only way for it to maintain its integrity and enforce its authority.

In addition, as part of the process of establishing the truth, progress must be made on the continuing allegations of chemical weapons use in other incidents that have not yet been fully investigated.

Similarly, my delegation once again calls on the United Nations and the OPCW Technical Secretariat to pay special attention to allegations of possession of chemical materials by non-State entities. For if those allegations prove to be true, the consequences would be disastrous, not only for Syria but also for the entire region and beyond. For countries of the Sahel, like mine,

that already face the threat of armed terrorist groups, some of which do not hesitate to pledge allegiance to Al-Qaida, the consequences would be just as disastrous.

In conclusion, I would like to underscore that the suspension of the rights and privileges of the Syrian Arab Republic within the OPCW will necessarily affect the already difficult cooperation between the Technical Secretariat and the Syrian Government. It is therefore necessary for the international community to avoid politicizing this issue and refrain from imposing further coercive measures on Syria, whose people are already facing enormous difficulties.

As we have always emphasized, whether it be the humanitarian, political or chemical weapons dimension that is being considered — and one wonders why these are addressed separately — it is essential that Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity be respected in the search for any lasting solution to this long-standing conflict.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Sabbagh (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I congratulate you, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council this month. I also thank your predecessor for his efforts during his presidency of the Council last month.

Last week, the second Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction took place, in which my country participated actively given its firm belief that it is necessary to eliminate weapons of mass destruction, which are a threat to regional and international peace and security. My country also stressed the importance of the five nuclear-weapon States participating in the Conference as observers, because they play a fundamental role in supporting consultations aimed at creating such a zone.

However, one State, which is a depositary of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and a sponsor of the 1995 decision on the Middle East, namely, the United States of America, has continued to boycott the work of that important Conference and has continued to protect Israel and its enormous arsenal of various weapons of mass destruction. We would have liked to have seen the same enthusiasm that we saw

today from the United States delegation when it came to the elimination of Israeli arsenal, which represents a threat to the peace and security in the Middle East.

My country reiterates our unequivocal condemnation of the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere and under any circumstances. Despite the prevailing politicization in the work of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), Syria has continued to cooperate with the OPCW in furtherance of the commitments my country undertook from the day it acceded to the Chemical Weapons Convention. Our accession was followed by my country's elimination of its entire stock of chemical weapons and their production facilities in record time.

In that regard, I would like to mention some aspects of cooperation between Syria and the OPCW.

First, my country continues its ongoing consultations and cooperation with the OPCW in order to prepare for the planned meeting between the Foreign Minister of Syria, Mr. Fayssal Mekdad, and the OPCW Director-General, Mr. Fernando Arias.

Secondly, the Syrian Arab Republic presented the OPCW its ninety-sixth monthly report, in which it reiterated continuous cooperation with the organization and expressed its regret with regard to attempts to undermine that cooperation. Furthermore, Syria responded to non-positive references about it contained in the latest report of the Director-General (see S/2021/989).

Thirdly, my country agreed to extend for six months the tripartite agreement among the Syrian Arab Republic, the OPCW and the United Nations Office for Project Services. That includes the facilitation and planning of OPCW activities and missions in Syria.

Fourthly, my country has welcomed the visit by the Declaration Assessment Team to Damascus for the holding of the twenty-fifth round of consultations as agreed between the two parties. Visas were delivered to all but one member of the Team. That member was not issued a visa because past experience proved him not to be objective. I stress that only one visa was withheld, not several, as some countries have claimed in their statements. The Team can visit Damascus tomorrow, if it so wishes.

Fifthly, my country welcomed the request of the Technical Secretariat to send a Fact-Finding Mission to Syria. We hope that it will finish its investigations

and issue its reports regarding incidents reported by Syria about the use of chemical weapons by terrorist groups. Those incidents happened more than five years ago. In her briefing, I would have liked Mrs. Nakamitsu to have urged the organization's Team to draw up its report on the matter.

Sixthly, the Syrian Arab Republic regularly presents information regarding the possession and use of toxic chemical weapons and materials by terrorists. Most recently, that was done through a letter sent from Syria to the President of the Security Council and the Secretary-General dated 29 November. That letter demonstrates the collusion between the Turkish intelligence services and the terrorist Al-Nusra Front/Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham.

As far as the work of the Declaration Assessment Team, my delegation would like to clarify that its mandate is limited to providing assistance to the Syrian National Committee on its initial declaration. Syria voluntarily welcomed work with the Team and cooperated with it for many years, through 24 rounds of consultation. Syria stresses that the Team is not an investigative body. It must therefore respect the information provided by Syria and present it honestly to the States parties.

Furthermore, in spite of what was claimed in the latest report of the Director-General and in Mrs. Nakamitsu's briefing today, the Technical Secretariat does not have a mandate to determine whether that information is valid from a scientific point of view.

As to the issuance of visas to international officials, that is a sovereign right of Syria, based purely on the professionalism and objectivity of the work of those officials. In that regard, it is important to emphasize that multilateralism is based not on the work of individuals but on that of the team as a whole. Syria showed significant flexibility to facilitate the holding of the twenty-fifth round of consultations. In fact, we agreed to send Syrian experts to The Hague. That was blocked for very unconvincing reasons, which really mask a sabotage attempt.

The Syrian Arab Republic reiterates that the information contained in its initial declaration and subsequent declarations is complete and accurate. We have always demonstrated openness to working transparently and objectively with the Declaration Assessment Team to provide all relevant clarifications. We therefore categorically reject the questioning of that

information. We believe that certain States are guilty of lies and exaggeration as part of a hostile policy towards Syria.

While we wish to see the OPCW as the guarantor of the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention and play its role regarding this important pillar of disarmament, we regret that it has become a platform that is exploited by a State, or a group of States, to target certain States, such as Syria or other countries. The disgraceful performance of the Fact-Finding Mission in the investigation of the Douma incident, whose scandalous repercussions continue to this day, the illegal establishment of the Investigation and Identification Team to use it as a sword of Damocles to undermine the national choices of certain countries and their rejection to hegemony politics and the unprecedented decision taken by the Conference of the States Parties to suspend Syria's enjoyment of its rights and privileges, which is not based on any documented facts or conclusions, amount to hostile practices against a State party that voluntarily joined the Convention. That reflects the way in which the United States and its Western allies dominate the work of the OPCW and pursue a hegemonic policy to serve their agendas, which has contributed to widening the divide and mistrust pertaining to the credibility, professionalism and impartiality of the work of the OPCW teams, thereby undermining its role.

In conclusion, those who talk about accountability in their statements are using the noble values of justice for political purposes. That happens in the OPCW. The basic principles of accountability require abandoning a selective approach that serves the interests of a particular State. That is why accountability must apply to all war crimes, including occupation, aggression and support for terrorism, for which certain States are responsible, particularly the destruction of a Member State and the dismantling of its institutions based on lies that are fabricated and presented in the Security Council itself or on a biased interpretation of the Charter of the United Nations. Such States must end their hypocrisy and their policy of double standards and stop exploiting such policies for their own political purposes.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Takht Ravanchi (Islamic Republic of Iran): I would like to begin by congratulating you, Mr. President,

on your presidency of the Security Council this month. I thank Mrs. Nakamitsu for her briefing.

We reiterate our principled position regarding the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic that, in order to prevent further suffering of its people and the dire ramifications of this conflict for regional peace and security, efforts must be redoubled to end this unfortunate conflict. However, that must be based on certain basic principles, in particular full respect for the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Syria and the withdrawal of all uninvited and occupying forces from all parts of Syria, as well as combating terrorist groups there in an effective manner. Many of those terrorists must be held accountable for the use of chemical weapons and chemical agents during the conflict.

We once again express our full support for the realization of the objectives of the Chemical Weapons Convention through its full, effective and non-discriminatory implementation. We also strongly call for the Convention's universality. Only through universal adherence to the Convention can the world feel safe and nations be assured that all chemical arsenals have been declared and destroyed. To achieve that noble objective, the Israeli regime must be compelled to join the Convention without any precondition or further delay.

As a major victim in contemporary history of the most systematic use of chemical weapons, Iran strongly condemns the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere and under any circumstances. The Islamic Republic of Iran also underlines the essential importance of ensuring the Convention's authority, as well as the independent, impartial and professional work performed by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). That is particularly important for issues related to the use of chemical agents in Syria.

We once again acknowledge the significant efforts made by the Syrian Government to implement its obligations under the Convention, including the complete destruction, in the least possible time and under severe conditions, of all its 27 chemical-weapons production facilities, as verified by the OPCW.

We welcome the submission by Syria of its ninety-sixth monthly report on its activities related to the destruction of chemical weapons and their production facilities. We also positively note the ongoing

preparations for the meeting between the OPCW Director-General and the Syrian Foreign Minister, and we hope that it will lead to the resolution of the remaining issues.

It is extremely disappointing that the Syrian chemical file has been politicized by certain countries, undermining the Convention's authority and the OPCW's credibility. Putting an end to that trend is, indeed, in the interest of the Convention, the OPCW, the rule of law and the maintenance of international peace and security.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mrs. Kocyigit Grba (Turkey): I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on the Niger's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for December. I also thank High Representative Nakamitsu for her briefing.

As the ninety-eighth monthly report (see S/2021/989) of the Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) clearly demonstrates, the Syrian regime continues to flout its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention. The identified gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies in the Syrian regime's chemical weapons declaration persist. As a result, the OPCW still cannot confirm that the declaration is accurate and complete. The regime consistently fails to provide the information needed in order to reveal the true nature and scope of its chemical weapons programme. We continue to be seriously concerned about the discovery of an undeclared chemical-weapons production facility in Syria and the regime's refusal to declare the chemical warfare agents produced and/or weaponized at that site.

The fact that the Al-Assad regime moved two chlorine cylinders related to the Douma chemical attack without prior notification or the approval of the Technical Secretariat only increases our concerns. Furthermore, the regime has abused the visa issue in order to hinder the OPCW officials' mandated activities on the ground. What we hear today is too little, too late.

We would like to underline once again that it is the obligation of the regime to provide immediate and unfettered access to personnel designated by the OPCW, in accordance with resolution 2118 (2013) and the Chemical Weapons Convention. We call on

Security Council members to act in unity and enforce the Council's own resolution — resolution 2118 (2013).

Turkey firmly supports efforts to ensure accountability for the gruesome crimes committed in Syria for more than a decade, including chemical attacks. That is why we co-sponsored the OPCW Executive Council decision of July 2020, and the decision adopted during the second part of the twenty-fifth Conference of the State Parties in April. The Security Council must live up to its responsibility and uphold the authority of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Turkey strongly condemns the repeated use of chemical weapons by the Al-Assad regime against innocent civilians. As of now, the regime's culpability in at least eight heinous chemical weapons attacks has been established by the reports of investigative bodies mandated by the United Nations and the OPCW. Turkey looks forward to the completion of the current investigations by the Investigation and Identification Team and the issuance of its next report. We reiterate

our support for the objective, impartial and professional work of the OPCW Technical Secretariat and its investigative bodies.

Just last week, we commemorated the Day of Remembrance for All Victims of Chemical Warfare. This is a sobering reminder of the need to act urgently to ensure full accountability for the chemical weapons attacks in Syria. Ending impunity and honouring the victims of chemical attacks is imperative to achieve lasting peace in that country. The key responsibility lies with those who embolden the Al-Assad regime in its non-compliance with its obligations.

As to the statement made by the representative of the Syrian regime, I will only reiterate that his presence here is an affront to the millions of Syrians who have suffered countless crimes at the hands of the regime. Therefore, I will not honour his baseless allegations with a response.

The meeting rose at 11.40 a.m.