
LATEST STATEMENTS

New York, 16 December 2013 - Secretary-General's remarks on the Final Report of the UN Mission to Investigate Allegations of the Use of Chemical Weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic [as prepared for delivery]

You will have seen or heard my briefing to the General Assembly on the report of the United Nations Mission to Investigate Allegations of the Use of Chemical Weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic. And of course, the full and final factual report is in your hands.

Today I will briefly review the Mission's main findings and offer a few comments of a more general nature.

I reiterate my appreciation to the Head of the Mission, Professor Åke Sellström, as well as to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the World Health Organization and their teams. I also express my gratitude to all Member States that supported this effort, included those visited by the Mission.

We are all now acutely aware that chemical weapons were used not only in the appalling August attack in the Ghouta area of Damascus, but also on several other occasions, including on a small scale, against civilians and military targets.

This new and broader knowledge should be of deep concern to all of us. Any use of chemical weapons, by anyone, under any circumstances, is a grave violation of the 1925 Protocol and other relevant rules of customary international law. The use of chemical weapons in Syria was a deplorable offense against the universal values of humankind.

Those responsible must be held accountable. The Security Council has said repeatedly that the use of weapons of mass destruction is a serious threat to international [peace] and security, and thus the Council has a primary role in bringing perpetrators to justice.

We must also do our utmost to deter future incidents, in Syria or elsewhere. I continue to urge all States that have not yet done so to sign, ratify and accede to the Chemical Weapons Convention without delay.

I commend the Security Council for its crucial role in mobilizing the international community to ensure the rapid and verified elimination of all Syrian chemical weapons. Good progress has been made in implementing resolution 2118 and the decisions of the OPCW Executive Council. I encourage the Security Council to strengthen the work of the 1540 Committee in implementing resolution 2118.

Through the extraordinary efforts of the OPCW-UN Joint Mission and the support pledged or provided by Member States, all of Syria's chemical weapons production facilities and equipment have been destroyed or disabled, along with all of the country's Category 3 chemical weapons.

Looking ahead, Syria must continue to implement its obligations. I trust the members of the Council and other Member States will provide the support needed to help make this happen.

The investigation led by Professor Sellstrom has demonstrated the immense value of the mechanism established under the authority of General Assembly resolution 42/37 C and endorsed by Security Council resolution 620 of 1988.

Still, there is room for strengthening the mechanism, for example by improving the preparedness of the technical teams and the ability of partner organizations to work together. I propose that we hold a lessons learned exercise, and I look forward to consulting with Member States about setting this in motion.

Producing the final report of the UN Investigation Mission is an important achievement. But it

should also serve as a wake-up call about the need to strengthen the global disarmament and non-proliferation regime. I count on the Security Council to take the lead in that effort.

Finally, Excellencies, I would like to say a word about the dire humanitarian situation and our diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis.

UN agencies are now reaching millions of people with food, water, medicine, shelter and educational supplies. Following an outbreak of polio, in October and November, we vaccinated more than 2 million children against this disease. We have started distributing winter aid as a bulwark against the harsh winter conditions that are now taking hold.

At the same time, obstacles to access remain severe. The unconscionable targeting of hospitals, other health facilities and medical personnel continues. And humanitarian appeals have been chronically underfunded throughout the conflict. The people of Syria need your governments and others to provide generous support at the pledging conference I am convening in Kuwait on January 15th. They also need your pressure on the Syrian sides to improve humanitarian access so that aid can reach all those in need.

One week after that comes the International Conference on Syria, which I am convening on January 22nd.

The conference will be the beginning of a process towards peace in Syria -- a process that would pave the way for a credible political transition.

The aim is to implement the Geneva 1 communiqué, which contains all the main elements for a political solution. There is no military solution to the Syrian crisis. The majority of the Syrian people want the fighting and violence to end.

We hope for gestures of good will before the conference, to build confidence and diminish the suffering of the Syrian people. These could include a cease-fire or at least a lowering of the levels of violence; the granting of unimpeded humanitarian access; the release of prisoners and detainees, especially women and children; and the lifting of various sieges.

There will be hurdles before the conference, and during the negotiations. The process is not expected to be brief, but neither should it be open-ended.

The people want and need a new Syria that reflects their needs and aspirations. I am convinced we can get there if all -- most importantly those with influence on the warring parties -- exert all possible efforts to help the Syrians reach the political solution that is the only way out of this tragedy.

Thank you.