

Secretary-General's first press conference of the year (transcript)

Excerpt from the opening statement relating to the OPCW-UN Joint Mission work

“...And with the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, we will finish the job of eliminating Syria’s chemical weapons materials and programmes, building on the progress that has been made despite wartime conditions and the complex nature of the task.

“Last year’s chemical weapons attacks in Syria reminded us of the horrors in the fields of Flanders during the First World War. The revulsion at that senseless conflict sparked a deeply felt need among all humankind for an effective instrument of common progress – a need that was met decades later with the birth of the United Nations. ...”

Excerpts from questions and answers relating to the OPCW-UN Joint Mission work

Q: Mr. Secretary-General, Happy New Year to you, sir; thank you so much. Your Special Coordinator of the Joint Mission with the OPCW [Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons], Sigrid Kaag, has been briefing in closed session the Security Council this week. My question to you, sir, is come 30 June, and the aim is to remove all of the chemical weapons from Syria and to destroy them, come 30 June, and this has been done according to the Joint Mission, can you put your hand on your heart and say that all chemical weapons have been removed from Syria, reminding you that these weapons that are going to be removed are based on a manifest given by the Syrian Government to the OPCW? And I do have a short follow-up. Thank you so much.

SG: I met the Joint Special Coordinator of the Joint Mission, Sigrid Kaag, earlier this week, and she briefed me about further progress that has been made towards the removal and elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme. As you know, the first quantity of priority chemical weapons and materials has been shipped out of Latakia port, and this process will continue. Even though there was a bit of delay in our programme, I think everything is now moving on schedule. The deadline of 30 June is, of course, very tight, very tight, because of the continuing violence in the region, but we will spare no effort. The Joint Mission is working day and night. So let us see, and our position at this time is to provide full support. In that regard, I would really like to thank those countries which have been providing logistical support by providing transportation, ships and naval escorts.

Q: Sorry, sir, my question was: Once 30 June comes and you certify that Syria is empty of chemical, based on the manifest that the Syrian Government itself gave to the OPCW, are you prepared then, if an attack happens after the certification, to blame the opposition, because you have given a certification to the Syrian Government by then?

SG: That certification and verification of the process, whether all of these chemical weapons and materials and facilities have been destroyed – that is up to the Joint Mission and the OPCW to do that, after 30 June, that we have to watch at this time.

10 January 2014, New York