


# Secretary-General's remarks to the General Assembly on the Final Report of the UN Mission to Investigate Allegations of the Use of Chemical Weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic

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**New York**

**13 December 2013**

I thank the President of the General Assembly for organizing this General Assembly meeting for me to be able to report on the United Nations Mission to Investigate Allegations of the Use of Chemical Weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic. The report includes the Mission's factual findings for all its investigations of all incidents reported by Member States since March 2013, as well as the results of its second visit to Syria, which occurred from 25 to 29 September.

I wish to express my gratitude 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, who are sitting together with us. I would like to thank them for their hard work in completing the investigation in the face of difficult and dangerous circumstances.

I also appreciate the support provided by the Member States visited by the Mission in the course of its activities. You will recall that three months ago the Mission concluded that chemical weapons were used on a relatively large scale on 21 August 2013 in the Ghouta area of Damascus, resulting in numerous casualties, particularly among civilians. Today, I note with deep concern that the team collected evidence and information corroborating allegations that chemical weapons were used on several occasions at multiple sites against both civilians and military targets.

While the Mission was unable to independently verify every aspect of these allegations, its assessment is that chemical weapons were probably used on 19 March at Khan Al Asal, on 24 August at Jobar, on 29 April at Saraqueb and on 25 August 2013 at Ashrafiah Sahnaya.

The Mission was unable to substantiate the allegations for two other incidents.

With respect to two other allegations, the Mission determined that technical factors, particularly the long passage of time, would preclude any objective attempt to ascertain the facts and that no further investigation was warranted.

For the remaining incidents, despite serious efforts to seek additional information, the Mission determined that it lacked sufficient information to proceed further and that no further investigation was warranted.

During its investigation, the Mission adhered to the most stringent protocols and the guidelines approved by the General Assembly. Its analytical results and factual findings are based solely on the information obtained by the Mission.

This high standard required the Mission to ensure or independently verify the chain of custody for all samples it collected. All samples were analyzed in laboratories designated by the OPCW.

In cases where the Mission obtained clear evidence of the use of chemical weapons, its findings were based on its interviews with survivors, medical personnel and other first responders, as well as its analysis of the medical records of the victims. These multiple streams of evidence confirmed symptoms consistent with poisoning by an organophosphorous compound.

For some incidents, the Mission also analyzed blood samples, including those it collected and others it was able to authenticate using DNA analysis. For two incidents, the analysis tested positive for signs of Sarin.

When it comes to chemical weapons, the international community speaks with one voice: 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. I deplore in the strongest possible terms the use of chemical weapons in Syria as an offense against the universal values of humankind.

The international community has a moral and political responsibility to hold accountable those responsible, to deter future incidents and to ensure that chemical weapons can never re-emerge as an instrument of warfare.

We must also do our utmost to achieve universal adherence to the Chemical Weapons Convention. I urge all States that have not yet done so to sign, ratify and accede to this vital instrument without delay.

Since the Ghouta incident, I have been very encouraged to see the international community come together to ensure the rapid and verified elimination of all Syrian chemical weapons. I welcome the progress that has been made in implementing Security Council resolution 2118 and the decisions of the OPCW Executive Council. I commend the extraordinary efforts of the OPCW-UN Joint Mission as well as the material support pledged or provided by Member States.

These efforts have resulted in the destruction of all chemical weapons production facilities and equipment, and all Category 3 chemical weapons in the country.

The international community continues to expect that the Syrian Arab Republic will implement faithfully its obligations related to the complete elimination of its chemical weapons programme by the first half of 2014, and that it will abide by global norms on disarmament and non-proliferation. I call upon all actors in the country to provide the necessary cooperation to make this happen.

This work has highlighted 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. At the same time, there is room for strengthening and improving the mechanism. I propose that we hold a lessons learned exercise that will help us to enhance the preparedness of the technical teams and enable partner organizations to work even more effectively to investigate allegations of the use of chemical weapons.

As we strive to complete this work, I remain determined to seek an urgent end to the conflict. Well over 100,000 people have been killed, mostly with conventional weapons. Nearly half the population of Syria is either displaced or in need of urgent humanitarian

assistance. The conflict is having profound impacts on the stability and economy of the entire Middle East. As Syrians prepare to work for a political solution at next month's conference on Syria, I appeal to all parties to demonstrate their leadership and vision by ceasing hostilities and instead working to meet the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people as they seek freedom and dignity. I call on the international community to do everything in its power to achieve this outcome.

Thank you for your attention.