

# Syria and Chemical Weapons: Selected entries/temporary printout

**The purpose of this selection** It has been suggested in various media reports that the international body established by the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), had declared Syria to be free of chemical weapons in January 2016.[1]

The selected entries from the Syria chronology [see note overleaf] have been chosen to provide the OPCW announcement in full from January 2016 and to illustrate official positions of the OPCW regarding the perceived completeness or otherwise of the declaration made by Syria under the provisions of the CWC subsequent to the January 2016 announcement.

Two OPCW positions are cited here. The first is a decision adopted by the OPCW's Executive Council. The Council includes the two countries most vocal on issues relating to Syria and chemical weapons -- Russia and the USA -- and the decision was adopted with the agreement of the governments of both of these countries. The second is a report from the OPCW's Technical Secretariat in the person of the Director-General which raises questions on the completeness of the declaration.

In summary, the January 2016 announcement related to destruction only of declared chemical weapons; the March 2016 decision illustrated that the CWC Member States had concerns about the completeness of the Syrian declaration (and that governments agreeing to this decision included Russia and the USA); and the July 2016 report from the Director-General raised questions regarding completeness.

[1] See, for example: [no author listed], 'OPCW Rejects Russian, Iranian Proposal on Investigating Idlib Chemical Incident', *Sputnik International*, 20 April 2017. The article states: 'In January 2016, the OPCW announced that all chemical weapons in Syria had been destroyed'. This statement is hyperlinked to a story covering the 4 January OPCW announcement.

**Richard Guthrie, 19 May 2017**

**4 January 2016** In The Hague, the Technical Secretariat of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons issues a press release entitled 'Destruction of Syrian chemical weapons completed' which reads:

Veolia, the US firm contracted by the OPCW to dispose of part of the Syrian chemical weapons stockpile, has completed disposal of 75 cylinders of hydrogen fluoride at its facility in Texas.

This completes destruction of all chemical weapons declared by the Syrian Arab Republic. The need to devise a technical solution for treating a number of cylinders in a deteriorated and hazardous condition had delayed the disposal process.

Commenting on this development, the Director-General of the OPCW, Ambassador Ahmet Üzümcü, said: 'This process closes an important chapter in the elimination of Syria's chemical weapon programme as we continue efforts to clarify Syria's declaration and address ongoing use of toxic chemicals as weapons in that country.'

[Note: The headline to this press notice — 'Destruction of Syrian chemical weapons completed' — is often later quoted

as if this announcement had indicated that *all* chemical weapons had been destroyed, rather than (as the text makes clear) this is confirmation that *declared* chemical weapons had been destroyed.]

**23 March 2016** In The Hague, the Executive Council of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons reconvenes its 81st session [see 15 March] and adopts a decision by consensus relating to the work of the Declaration Assessment Team working on the declaration submitted by Syria as a State Party to the Chemical Weapons Convention.

The decision makes reference to two papers that are not made public — 'Report on the Work of the Declaration Assessment Team Covering the Period April 2014 to September 2015' (EC-80/P/S/1, dated 25 September 2015) by the Technical Secretariat and 'Report on the Work of the Declaration Assessment Team Regarding the Declaration and Related Submissions by the Syrian Arab Republic' (EC-81/HP/DG.1, dated 22 February 2016) by the Director-General. On the first of these, the decision notes that the Council at its 80th session 'underscored the substantial unresolved issues, including the gaps, inconsistencies, and discrepancies identified by the Secretariat' in this report and 'stressed the importance of fully verifying that the declaration and related submissions of the Syrian Arab Republic are accurate and complete, as required by the Chemical Weapons Convention ... and EC-M-33/DEC.1' [see 27 September 2013]. On the latter, the decision 'Expresses concern regarding ... the gaps, inconsistencies, and discrepancies that remain with respect to chemical weapons facilities, activities, munitions, and chemical materials, and concluding that the Secretariat is unable at present to verify fully that the declaration and related submissions of the Syrian Arab Republic are accurate and complete, as required by the Convention and EC-M-33/DEC.1'. The decision further: 'Expresses concern that, with respect to these gaps, inconsistencies, and discrepancies, the Director-General has reported that no further progress has been possible for nine of 17 unresolved issues regarding the Syrian declaration and related submissions' and 'Requests the Secretariat, through the Declaration Assessment Team, to continue its efforts, on an expedited basis, to verify the accuracy and completeness of the declaration and related disclosures of the Syrian Arab Republic, and to address the gaps, inconsistencies, and discrepancies it has identified'.

On actions to be taken, the decision requests the Director-General, in parallel with the efforts of the Declaration Assessment Team, to meet with Syrian officials with the intention of addressing the unresolved issues and 'to underscore the importance of fully verifying that the declaration and related submissions of the Syrian Arab Republic are accurate and complete'. The decision notes that the Director-General 'shall inform the Council of the outcome of this engagement in advance of the Eighty-Second Session of the Council' and requests that the Director-General 'report to the Council at all future sessions any unresolved issues regarding the Syrian declaration and related submissions'. The decision 'Calls upon the Syrian Arab Republic to cooperate fully with the Director-General's engagement as

well as in the continuing activities of the Secretariat's Declaration Assessment Team'.

[1] Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, Executive Council, 'Report by the Director-General Regarding the Declaration and Related Submissions by the Syrian Arab Republic', EC-81/DEC.4, 23 March 2016, 2 pp.

**6 July 2016** In The Hague, The OPCW Director-General submits a report to the Executive Council on further consultations with Syria on its declaration under the Chemical Weapons Convention.[1] The report follows from Executive Council decision EC-81/DEC.4 [see 23 March] and recounts the work of the Declaration Assessment Team.

The report states: 'The Secretariat notes that as a result of this additional information, the Syrian Arab Republic provided new submissions to update relevant parts of its declaration. These amendments may be considered as additional steps towards completion of the declaration. However, the Secretariat is not in a position to verify the underpinning explanations given for these amendments.'

The report includes three sub-paragraphs of key conclusions with respect to the three main clusters of issues:

(a) The role of the Scientific Studies and Research Centre (SSRC) in the Syrian chemical weapons programme. The Syrian Arab Republic declared some parts of the SSRC under Articles VI and X of the Convention. However, the Secretariat assesses that such declarations do not adequately address the full scope of the SSRC's activities related to the Syrian chemical weapons programme. In this regard, the Secretariat finds that there is sufficient scientific and technical basis to declare all relevant parts of the SSRC under Articles III and VI of the Convention.

(b) Results of analyses of samples collected at multiple locations in the Syrian Arab Republic. Whereas in some instances the results of analyses confirm information provided in the Syrian Arab Republic's declaration, a majority of sample results indicated the presence of unexpected or undeclared chemical compounds. Such results indicate potentially undeclared chemical weapons-related activities at these locations. Following extensive technical consultations on these results, the Secretariat considers that many of the explanations provided by the Syrian Arab Republic are not scientifically or technically plausible, and that the presence of several undeclared chemical warfare agents is still to be clarified.

(c) Other chemical weapons-related activities that occurred prior to the Syrian Arab Republic's accession to the Convention. Based on information made available through technical meetings, interviews, site visits, or documents, the Secretariat has been able to verify some of the information provided by the Syrian Arab Republic. However, the Secretariat is unable to verify the precise quantity of chemical weapons that were destroyed or consumed prior to the Syrian Arab Republic's accession to the Convention.

On the number of chemical agents involved in the Syrian programme, the report notes that Syria had declared production or possession of four chemical warfare agents in its initial declaration and that as a result of consultations with the Declaration Assessment Team had later declared one additional chemical agent. The report states: 'However, the results of sampling and analysis indicated potentially declarable activities involving five additional chemical agents. Following recent consultations with the Secretariat, the Syrian Arab Republic declared research and development of one more chemical agent. At present, Syria has not yet adequately explained the presence of indicators of four chemical warfare agents.'

On matters of political cooperation, the report states: 'A significant amount of time and effort has already been expended in order to resolve the outstanding issues enumerated in the report, including the high-level engagement of the Director-General. The Secretariat is of the view that a continuation of this effort without a change in approach by the Syrian Arab Republic to resolve all outstanding issues related

to its declaration is unlikely to yield concrete results. The Secretariat reiterates its call for the Syrian Arab Republic to provide information that is scientifically and technically plausible, to facilitate access to individuals with strategic knowledge and oversight of the Syrian chemical weapons programme, and to engage in a dialogue that is proactive and fully transparent.'

The report concludes:

At present, the Secretariat is not able to resolve all identified gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies in Syria's declaration, and therefore cannot fully verify that Syria has submitted a declaration that can be considered accurate and complete in accordance with the Chemical Weapons Convention or Council decision EC-M-33/DEC.1, dated 27 September 2013.

[1] Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, Director-General, 'Conclusions on the Outcome of Consultations with the Syrian Arab Republic Regarding Its Chemical Weapons Declaration', EC-82/DG.18, 6 July 2016, 3 pp.

**Please note --** the Syria chronology is an unfunded project and should be considered as a 'work in progress'. The extracts here have been circulated in order to assist understanding of developments in Syria as they unfold. Entries are updated on a regular basis, therefore, ***please check with the author before quoting or citing as more information on any particular event may have become available.*** Comments are welcome.

Copies of the chronology will be made available via <<http://www.cbw-events.org.uk/syria.html>>.

Richard Guthrie

[richard@cbw-events.org.uk](mailto:richard@cbw-events.org.uk)

#### **Entry formatting**

As this is a working draft there are a number of types of entry: finished entries, based on the information available at the time; those have been put in place as a holding entries; and those containing something that needs checking or adding to. The entries in the above categories appear thus:

**00 XXXXXXX 0000** An entry considered ready for publication — i.e., with content and cross-referencing complete, although still subject to change if new information becomes available.

**H 00 XXXXXXX 0000** [Holding entry, essentially rough information to help build the details of the chronology and needing further work — text is included in square brackets.]

**Q 00 XXXXXXX 0000** An entry containing something needing checking factually (or further information to be obtained), or which contains suggested edits to be considered. May also include changes or corrections that should be entered into the *CBW Events* source files.