Statement following the Fall of the Syrian Government, January 2025

Since the fall of the Syrian government in early December 2024 and its takeover by HTS, there have been repeated allegations made about Syria's stockpiles of chemical weapons, its use of such weapons between 2012 and 2018, and claims from alleged witnesses of the April 7, 2018, Douma incident that they were coerced into giving false testimonies. To date, and over one month since the fall of the Syrian government, there is no clear indication of whether or when the OPCW will deploy into Syria in order to verify claims regarding its CW status.

These events underscore the importance of the issues raised by the OPCW's own inspectors, who testified to the manipulation and censorship of information during the OPCW Douma investigation, and the need to provide a 'transparent and neutral forum in which the concerns of all the investigators can be heard as well as ensuring that a fully objective and scientific investigation is completed'. As such, we support any calls for there to be a fresh evaluation of all the evidence now available.

In particular, we reiterate the call made in the BG21 Review for the release of all the evidence, documentation and scientific studies drawn upon during the investigation (duly redacted to protect identities) including the complete and detailed expert assessments by toxicologists, full transcripts of witness interviews, raw data and findings of the engineering studies, and full analytical report from the Designated Laboratories that analysed environmental and biological samples.

We again call on the Director General to use the authority given to him under Article VIII of the CWC, to seek the scientific advice of the Organisation's Scientific Advisory Board to examine all of the relevant documentation together with the FFM Final Report. A panel of experts, convened on the basis of relevant expertise and equitable geographic distribution, should be drawn from the SAB that is acceptable to all members of the Executive Council. The scientific panel would then examine all the evidence available and individually sign off on their agreement with the findings, conclusions, and recommendations to the DG.

We would also like to take this opportunity to reiterate the following points made in our 2024 Autumn statement, all of which are more relevant than ever:

In May of 2023 the BG21 Review of the OPCW-Douma controversy was published. On the 11th of July 2023, at the 9372nd UNSC meeting in New York, the Brazilian government demanded that the OPCW respond to the issues raised in our review. The Director General of the OPCW 'took note' of the BG21 Review but has thus far failed to provide any response to the substantive issues it raises.

Since then, a report, titled The OPCW and the Chemical Weapons Convention: A Way Forward, about the OPCW/Douma controversy has been issued in the European Parliament produced by MEPs Clare Daly and Mick Wallace. This report has been circulated to the OPCW States Parties and its Scientific Advisory Board. The report is available here. It focuses on the mistreatment of the OPCW whistleblowers, the incompatibility between the OPCW Syria Fact Finding Missions (FFMs) and the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC)

and makes suggestions for restoring the OPCW's credibility by ensuring its full return to operating within the Chemical Weapons Convention framework. Taken together with the BG21 Review, which documents in full the events surrounding the Douma controversy and sets out the procedural and scientific flaws contained in the OPCW's Douma investigation, this additional document demands that the OPCW senior management must finally address the issues raised by the former OPCW scientists.

With this additional document in mind, BG21 reiterates the following points, fully presented and evidenced in the BG21 Review:

> 1) In June 2018, the original FFM report was secretly altered at the last minute and its key findings suppressed whilst misleadingly suggesting, without any scientific evidence, that chlorine gas had been released (BG21 Review pp: 103-106 and pp: 45-48 and p.26: A Way Forward pp: 24-25). This incident confirms that one or more officials within the OPCW conspired in order to attempt to publish a scientifically fraudulent and misleading report (See BG21 Review pages 26-27 and A Way forward pages 24-25). As we detail on page 62 of the BG21 Review, this act of malpractice should now be investigated as a suspected breach of confidentiality.
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> 2) The original toxicology report provided by NATO chemical warfare experts (toxicologists) confirmed that the 43 civilian victims were not killed by chlorine gas. This bombshell finding was subsequently suppressed and, come the 2023 IIT Report, demonstrably false and misleading scientific claims were presented in order to suggest otherwise (BG21 Review: pp; 39-42 and pp; 65-77).
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> 3) Across the OPCW reports, there is a clearly identifiable pattern of distortions involving the suppression of inconvenient witness testimony (BG21 Review: pp; 43-45 and pp; 79-99), exaggeration of chemical analyses (BG21 Review: pp; 45-48 and pp; 101-117), and obfuscation of the impact studies necessary to show whether the two cylinders found at the alleged attack sites had been dropped from a Syrian Air Force helicopter (BG21 Review: pp; 49-52 and pp;119-135).

Taken together, these scientific flaws in the OPCW's Douma reports mean that the central claim, that there are 'reasonable grounds' the alleged chemical weapons attack occurred, is inaccurate and untenable. Furthermore, as explained in full in the new report for the European Parliament and the BG21 Review, it is clear that the FFMs having been operating outside of the framework of the CWC:

> 4) The FFMs 'are an ad hoc mechanism whose processes and procedures have not been agreed in any intergovernmental treaty, and those processes and procedures lack transparency and accountability' (A Way Forward: p.38).
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> 5) The FFMs have no effective scientific peer-review process precisely because they are controlled by the Office of the Director General (ODG) and the OPCW's technical divisions are excluded (A Way Forward: p. 42). This arrangement is 'inconsistent with sound scientific practices and creates the opportunity for undue political influence to be exerted on the FFMs' (BG21 Review: pp. 18-19)

It should be clear that the failure to respond to these documented flaws is unacceptable for an international UN-linked organisation tasked with providing objective and scientific evidence on what are matters of geopolitical significance and which pertain to international peace and security.

Not only has the truth of what happened in Douma been betrayed by a manipulated investigation, the operation of the OPCW, and therefore also of the UN, is being fundamentally compromised.

It remains entirely within the power of the DG to appoint a scientific panel, through the OPCW's Scientific Advisory Board, that can evaluate both the BG21 Review and all of the evidence now available in the public domain.

Finally, and as we made clear in our statement of 18 January 2024, what is now known about the OPCW's Douma investigation has ramifications for all allegations regarding the use of chemical weapons in Syria and, more broadly the threat posed by an OPCW that is not fully independent of major powers. The danger posed to international peace and security is that a partial OPCW can be used as a trigger mechanism for unjustified military action. This is a matter of the highest concern, especially given the fraught state of international relations and the level of conflict we are now witnessing.

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