



OPCW

OPCW Issues a New Report Denying the Syrian Regime's and Russia's Allegations Accusing the Opposition of Using Chemical Weapons

It Must Be Based on the Reports Issued by the Joint Investigative Mechanism and the Investigation and Identification Team's Report to Hold the Syrian Regime Accountable for the Widespread Use of Chemical Weapons

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The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), founded in June 2011, is a non-governmental, independent group that is considered a primary source for the OHCHR on all death toll-related analyses in Syria.

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I. The OPCW Fact-Finding Mission Confirmed the Use of Chemical Weapons in Syria 43 Times, Most of Which by the Syrian Regime:

On Thursday, October 1, 2020, the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) issued two separate reports, in each of these it dealt with an incident of alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria. The first incident was on the alleged use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime against the people of Saraqeb city on August 1, 2016, which wasn't under its control at the time, with [the report being issued in 28 pages](#). The second incident was the Syrian regime's allegation that the Syrian opposition used chemical weapons against neighborhoods in Aleppo city on November 24, 2018, and [the report was issued in 98 pages](#) in English only.

During the past few days, we at the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) reviewed the two reports, and cross-checked them with the findings that we previously reached, and we will detail in this report the notes we have recorded, with this process having been ongoing since June 2014, when the OPCW issued [its first report](#), as we have, since that report, done a continuous review of all the reports that OPCW issued, with the number of reports that included incidents of chemical weapons use reaching [nearly 16 reports](#) to date. According to our analysis of these reports, we noted that they dealt with nearly 60 possible chemical attacks in Syria, and we have found that it had confirmed the use of chemical weapons in 43 of them, the last of which was [the attack on Douma city](#) in Damascus Suburbs governorate in April 2018.

Then, we cross-checked the 43 incidents that the OPCW has confirmed in its investigations cited in its reports with those documented on the SNHR database. We found two main points:

The first point: There is a match in 30 of the attacks recorded, and as we have documented, we found that 28 of these attacks were carried out by Syrian Regime forces, with two carried out by ISIS.

The second point: There are a further 192 chemical weapons attacks documented on the SNHR's database that have not been investigated by the OPCW. These attacks are documented in our database in great detail, including information such as time, place, type of munitions, number of injuries, victims, etc. We believe that these documented attacks may be a priority for investigation by the OPCW.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights has signed [Principles of Cooperation document](#) with the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team (IIT), under which SNHR shared data we documented on the use of chemical weapons in Syria.



“We decisively support the professional work that the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons carries out in accordance with the highest standards and methodologies used, and we hope that the rigorous evidence the OPCW has will be used in holding to account the Syrian regime that has used weapons of mass destruction against Syrian citizens dozens of times and misled the OPCW and the international community, as it became clear that all its allegations were false, including the Aleppo incident which it fabricated.”



Fadel Abdul Ghany

**Chairman of the Syrian
Network for Human Rights**

II. The OPCW Deals a Harsh Blow to the Syrian Regime and Russia Concerning the Opposition's Use of Chemical Weapons in Aleppo in November 2018:

The Syrian regime alleged that factions of the Armed Opposition bombed neighborhoods in Aleppo city using chemical weapons on November 24, 2018, with Russia supporting its ally the Syrian regime, and China followed suit, then the UN Security Council called upon the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission to investigate this incident. It is worth noting that Russian military personnel arrived at the site of the incident on the very next day, before the arrival of the investigation committees, indicating high coordination with the Russian forces. The FFM report stated that the Russian military police were present at the meetings that took place with the Syrian authorities side by side, which shows the extent of Russian interest and desire for the success of the fabrication of the incident.

The FFM operates according to stringent standards and methodology. FFM visited Aleppo city once, visited the three hospitals that treated the injured, obtained a copy of the records, and conducted dozens of interviews with witnesses, survivors, and doctors, as well as reviewed the data provided by the Syrian regime. Russia has also provided the FFM with data and samples. FFM also visited the Scientific Studies and Research Center in Jamraya city in Damascus Suburbs in order to take samples from there and then analyze them in the OPCW designated laboratories.

The report stated that the Syrian regime provided access to environmental samples such as fragments of the weapons used, but did not provide any additional evidence, such as documentation and sample collection methodology, handling, or processing methodologies that were applied, nor any laboratory logbooks or information about the chain of custody, nor which samples were collected by the Syrian regime, and which samples were collected by the Russian chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) team members. Accordingly, the Fact-Finding Mission assessed the samples as low-value evidence, insufficient to establish a link between the reported incident

and the samples. However, the FFM itself analyzed the samples in OPCW designated laboratories. The scope of the analysis included scheduled chemicals, their precursors and degradation products, riot control agents (meaning tear gas used in riot control), and chlorinated organic chemicals. The laboratory reports did not show the presence of any such chemicals in the samples.

Based on these results, and according to the non-specificity of the signs and symptoms, the FFM conducted the assessment and decided not to proceed with the collection of biomedical samples, as the analysis has to be targeted to the compounds found in the environmental samples or to specific signs and symptoms, which were not available, with the FFM stating at this point:

“The full analysis of fragments, which included a technical weapons exploitation, visual observations, and chemical analysis, cannot confirm that the fragments received are related to a chemical incident.”

As for the symptoms the injured developed, the FFM concluded that:

“Neither the general clinical presentation of those affected, nor the visual or olfactory description of the substance can be related to a specific chemical. The signs and symptoms presented are a general physiological response to an array of external factors and can be caused by a large number of substances and diseases.”

As for the witnesses presented by the Syrian regime, the FFM concluded that:

“witness accounts did not provide substantial information to help identify the source or sources of the dispersion. The fragments provided by the Syrian Arab Republic could not be linked to the reported incident. Therefore, it is not possible to determine the particular device or devices involved in the dispersion of the substance, nor the exact point or points of origin of the dispersion, as there is no substantial evidence to corroborate this information.”

Based on all this, the FFM concluded that it had not confirmed whether chemicals were used as a weapon in the incident that took place in al Khaldiya neighborhood and its surroundings in north-west Aleppo on November 24, 2018.

III. The FFM Inability to Visit Saraqeb City and the Hospital Contributed to the Failure to Confirm the Chemical Weapons Use:

The Syrian regime obstructs the FFM work in the incidents in which the regime was involved in the use of chemical weapons, and it has also banned entry to the United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry for nine years, as well as banned all independent human rights organizations, and it controls this entry according to its interest. It is worth noting that the ruling regime has not conducted any investigation into dozens of incidents of chemical weapons use in Syria, nor in any of the other violations that have reached the level of crimes against humanity.

The FFM stated that its inability to visit the site of the incident and the hospital contributed mainly to its inability to confirm whether chemicals were used as a weapon in the incident that took place in Saraqeb on August 1, 2016, and despite this, the FFM concluded that: “The FFM was able to corroborate the presence of witnesses at the site at the time of the allegation. Witness narratives of events were consistent and in line with the described medical signs and symptoms.”

We at the SNHR have documented this incident in [a previous report](#) in detail, where we recorded an attack using barrel bombs, with this type of weapons being only in possession of the Syrian regime, as these are dropped from the air. At around 23:00, we recorded that Syrian regime helicopters dropped two barrel bombs that carried cylinders containing poison gas on a residential neighborhood in the center of Saraqeb. The two barrel bombs landed two to three kilometers apart. We documented at that time the injury of at least 30 individuals, who suffered from breathing difficulties. In addition, one shop was almost completely destroyed, while a number of residential houses were partially destroyed; we spoke with a number of eyewitnesses and survivors of the accident, as well as with paramedics and medical personnel; the Independent International Commission of Inquiry confirmed this chemical attack in its investigations and condemned the Syrian regime's use of chemical weapons.

IV. Conclusions and Recommendations:

Conclusions:

1. In the incident in which the Syrian regime alleged that the Armed Opposition had used chemical weapons, we noted how it facilitated the work of the Fact-Finding Mission, and harnessed the witnesses and doctors, the Jamraya laboratory, protection, visiting the site of the incident, and hospitals; this same regime has long obstructed and prevented the work of international investigation committees and independent human rights organizations, and still prevents the entry of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry for nine years.
2. In the cases in which it was involved in the use of chemical weapons, the Syrian regime not only obstructed and prevented the work of the investigation committees, but it destroyed and distorted the site of the incident in the places it had regained control over, and it threatened the witnesses and the injured.
3. The Syrian regime has not conducted any investigation into the death of nearly a quarter of a million Syrian citizens, nor the deaths due to torture, nor the use of chemical weapons and barrel bombs, as the life of Syrian citizens is of almost nothing to it.
4. The Jamraya Center is dominated by the regime's security services; without a doubt, the results of its analyzes will be identical to what the Syrian regime wants. There are no independent institutions, as the Syrian regime is a mere totalitarian regime.

5. The results of the investigations conducted by the Syrian Network for Human Rights on the alleged Aleppo attack have shown since November 2018 that it was a fabrication by the Syrian regime with the support of Russian forces.
6. Russia and the Syrian regime tried to mislead and deceive the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons in the Aleppo incident, with Russia and the Syrian regime aiming to obtain any statement or declaration condemning any other party in order to build upon it and distort the fact that the Syrian regime used chemical weapons.
7. The extent of Russia's interest, concern and follow-up shows that it is a key partner in fabricating the Aleppo incident. The report dealt a severe blow to both Russia and the Syrian regime, however, Russia received the bulk of it.

Recommendations: The evidence and data possessed by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons must be based upon in order to hold the Syrian regime to account for its use of weapons of mass destruction:

The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons is distinguished by consisting of experts and specialists, using high standards in data collection and analysis, but one of the most important features of the OPCW is its ability to analyze samples because of the laboratories it works with, with this feature being not available to local human rights organizations or research centers. The OPCW has participated in the Joint Investigative Mechanism established by [Security Council Resolution No. 2235](#), which issued seven reports based on highly accurate and credible evidence, and found the Syrian regime responsible for the use of chemical weapons in five incidents; the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) is also affiliated with the OPCW, with the IIT issuing [its first report](#) in April 2020, condemning the Syrian regime use of chemical weapons in three incidents. We believe that these reports, along with the reports in which the OPCW has confirmed that a chemical weapon has been used, with the firm evidence it contains, constitute a solid base that can be relied upon in holding the Syrian regime judicially to account, and more importantly, holding it politically accountable by not accepting its return to the fold of the international community, and considering it a rogue regime and an international outlaw. All countries of the world must fight and deter the Syrian regime, given its use of weapons of mass destruction, and serious pressure on it must be accelerated to achieve a political transition that leads to a democratic government that respects international law and human rights.



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