



Statement

We Welcome the OPCW's Report, Which Identified the Syrian Regime's Responsibility for the Chemical Weapons Use in Saraqeb City

The SNHR, As One of the Report's Sources, Calls for Urgently Imposing the Most Severe Penalties against the Users of Weapons of Mass Destruction

Yesterday, Monday, April 12, 2021, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons' (OPCW) Investigation and Identification Team (IIT), whose mission is to identify the perpetrators of the crime of using chemical weapons, issued its second report; this report was the result of the IIT's investigation into the chemical weapons attack on Saraqeb city on February 4, 2018, with the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) having previously determined that chemical weapons were used on the same date and in the same location.

The report was based on rigorous methodology determined by analyzing samples, munition remnants, topographical studies of the concerned area and gas dispersion models, and reviewing thousands of files of up to 400 gigabytes in size, as well as obtaining statements from more than 30 witnesses or survivors of the bombing incident, reviewing symptoms reported by victims and medical personnel, and examining photos, including satellite images, as well as conducting intensive consultations with experts, and analyzing data from State Parties, as well as from specialized and human rights organizations, including the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR). The OPCW also has laboratories that are among the most accurate in the world which analyze materials and samples. Moreover, the conclusions of the investigation mentioned in the report are considered conclusive and constitute a strong article of evidence that can be presented to public prosecutors in countries that enjoy universal jurisdiction, and can be used in the event of the establishment of a special international court for Syria, which is without a doubt a powerful blow to the Syrian regime and its Russian ally.

The report confirmed the responsibility of the Syrian regime for the Saraqeb attack, on February 4, 2018, concluding that there are reasonable grounds to believe that at approximately 21:22 on February 4, 2018, a military helicopter from the Syrian regime's Air Force, under the control of the 'Tiger Forces', dropped at least one cylinder on eastern Saraqeb city. This cylinder ruptured and released a toxic gas, chlorine, which dispersed over a large area affecting 12 named individuals.

The 'Tiger Forces' are backed by Russia and, as SNHR indicated in a previous report, we believe that Russia was involved in this attack which occurred the day after the shooting down of a Russian warplane in Saraqeb. The Syrian regime's constant refusal to allow the IIT to enter Syria, despite repeated requests, is an indication of the Syrian regime's and its Russian ally's fear of the regime's crimes being exposed, with their sole interests being their unwillingness to expose the regime's atrocious violations and their determination to conceal its repeated uses of weapons of mass destruction carried out in coordination and cooperation with Russia.

On February 13, 2018, we at the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) issued a [report](#) in which we documented the details of the chemical attack launched by the Syrian regime on Saraqeb city, with the Human Rights Council's Independent International Commission of Inquiry also [documenting this attack and identifying the Syrian regime's responsibility for it](#).

The IIT issued [its first report](#) on April 8, 2020, which concluded that the Syrian regime had used chemical weapons in three different incidents in al Latamena city. We issued [a statement](#) on this subject.

The Syrian regime [ratified the CWC in September 2013](#) after being threatened with the use of military force against it over its use of chemical weapons against the Damascus Suburbs governorate on August 21, 2013. By ratifying the CWC, Syria became a state party prohibited from using, manufacturing or stockpiling chemical weapons, making it mandatory for the regime to destroy its stockpile of chemical weapons; instead, however, the regime has repeatedly used CWs since ratifying the Convention on 184 separate occasions in total to date, as documented by the SNHR database, including the attack that took place against Saraqeb city on February 4, 2018.

The Syrian regime's repeated, blatant and deliberate violations of multiple articles of the Convention, mean that the [Executive Council has a responsibility](#) to take action in regard to the Syrian regime's violation of this Convention and to obtain a clear condemnation from the majority of member states. Whilst it's clear that Russia, China, Venezuela, and other states that support the Syrian regime's use of chemical weapons will not condemn its use of these weapons, but will instead deny their well-documented use, the Executive Council is still compelled to take all necessary steps to hold the Syrian regime accountable, and to refer the case to the United Nations General Assembly and the United Nations Security Council, so that the Security Council bears its responsibilities for this blatant and repeated use of weapons of mass destruction in the modern age, which is the greatest threat to international peace and security.

Based on all of the aforementioned information, in addition to the two reports [by the OPCW's Investigation and Identification Team \(IIT\)](#), which confirmed the responsibility of the Syrian regime for four chemical attacks, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons should take the ultimate possible measures against the Syrian regime at the upcoming meeting of the States Parties, taking place between April 20-22, 2021, given the regime's flagrant violation of the Treaty on the Prohibition of the Use of Chemical Weapons; the OPCW should suspend Syria's rights and privileges, request all states parties to take collective measures against the Syrian regime, refer the issue of the use of chemical weapons in Syria to the Security Council with the recommendation that it take serious action under Chapter VII, and should not yield to Russian pressure that supports the use of chemical weapons of mass destruction against the Syrian people; in the event that the Security Council fails to take effective and concrete measures, the OPCW should proceed by taking the case to the United Nations General Assembly and demanding intervention based on Resolution 337, aka the Uniting for Peace Resolution¹, and finally it should request all member states, the vast majority of the world's nations, to impose multiple sanctions on the Syrian regime and to use their national judiciaries to hold the regime accountable for its use of Chemical Weapons of mass destruction.

Finally, in January 2020, [the Syrian Network for Human Rights \(SNHR\) formally signed a Principles of Cooperation agreement with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons' \(OPCW\) Investigation and Identification Team \(IIT\)](#), enabling SNHR to contribute to the investigations into the incidents that the team is currently conducting and will conduct in the future, since the SNHR possesses an extensive database documenting the use of chemical weapons in Syria.

The SNHR fully supports the mandate and work of the IIT, and confirms that these investigations are an essential part of the process of holding those involved in the use of weapons of mass destruction in Syria accountable and prosecuting them, as well as ensuring that they do not enjoy impunity and exposing their lies and crimes, and ensuring that the international community takes responsibility for punishing them, as stipulated in Article 8 of the Chemical Weapons Convention².

¹ United Nations, General Assembly, Resolution 377 (d-5) "Uniting for Peace", <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/55C2B84DA9E0052B05256554005726C6>

² OPCW, Chemical Weapons Convention, Article 8, <https://www.opcw.org/chemical-weapons-convention/articles/article-viii-organization>

The Syrian Network for Human Rights stresses its willingness to contribute to all states' and international organizations' reports on the human rights situation in Syria, and will make the greatest possible effort to continue to report the ongoing violations and incidents objectively and credibly to achieve the goal of protecting civilians in Syria, holding all perpetrators accountable, and helping to start the country along the path of change towards long-denied democracy.

To read the report issued by the Investigation and Identification Team, please visit [the link](#).