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Statement on Syria Chemical Weapons

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Statement by Lise Gregoire-van Haaren, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the United Nations New York, 14 April 2018

Mr President,

Thank you and I would like to start by thanking the Secretary General for his statement today. Yesterday as well as today you spoke of the litany of horrors that the Syrian population has experienced in the past seven years of which the chemical weapons attacks are amongst the most gruesome.

The world hardly needs reminding of the unspeakable suffering that countless Syrian men, women and children have endured.

A suffering that comes at the hands of the Assad and his allies.

The Syrian regime has left the world no doubt as to its willingness to unleash terror on its own population.

The repeated use of chemical weapons counts as the most cynical expression of this campaign.

Just a week ago the world was yet again confronted with reports of chemical weapons use, this time in Douma.

All the time, the Russian Federation has left the world no doubt as to its readiness to stand by Assad every step of the way.

And it has blocked resolutions in this Council which could have stopped the violence.

I call upon all members of the Security Council to support a collective, meaningful response to the use of chemical weapons.

But even if this Council fails to act, it should be clear to the world that the use of chemical weapons is never permissible.

Mr President, Against the background of past horrors and the unabated risk of recurrence, the response by France, the United Kingdom and the United States is understandable.

The response was measured in targeting a limited number of military facilities that were used by the Syrian regime in its illegal chemical weapons arsenal. The action taken by these three countries made clear that the use of chemical weapons is unacceptable.

Mr President, Last night's response was aimed at reducing the capabilities to execute future chemical attacks.

But do not let the Syrian regime and the Russian Federation think for a moment that we will waver in our pursuit of full accountability for the perpetrators of past chemical attacks.

We will not settle for anything less than an independent, impartial attribution mechanism, so that the culprits of those heinous attacks can be identified and held accountable.

And we call on the Russian Federation to stop opposing this.

The use of chemical weapons is a serious violation of international law and may constitute a war crime or crime against humanity.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands strongly believes that the international community must fully uphold the standard that the use of chemical weapons is never permissible.

Impunity cannot and will not prevail.

But should this Council continue to suffer from the paralysis inflicted by a single permanent member, we must not forget that the UN is bigger than this Council alone.

We have strong leadership at the top of the United Nations organisation and we have a powerful General Assembly.

Both have to consider all instruments to advance accountability for the use of chemical weapons.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands welcomes every option to establish an independent and impartial mechanism, be it within the UN-framework, or within the framework of other relevant international organizations, as long as it results in a mechanism that can establish who is responsible, so that subsequently the perpetrators can be held to account.

Any new mechanism should build upon the important work of the JIM and the ongoing OPCW Fact Finding Mission.

It is therefore crucial that the Fact Finding Mission has complete and unhindered access to all information and sites it deems necessary to conduct its investigations with regard to the attack with chemical weapons in Douma last weekend.

Mr President, The international norms against the use of chemical weapons must be respected.

And the Syrian people must be relieved from the violence, hardship and injustice that has haunted them for so long.

To that end, we call for a political solution and immediate cessation of violence - as earlier agreed upon by this Council -, as well as full, unhindered and immediate humanitarian access.

We re-iterate our determination to achieve justice for the victims.

The need to collectively stand up for the fate of the Syrian people is now more apparent than ever.

Thank you Mr President.