

FACT SHEET

UNITED NATIONS MISSION TO INVESTIGATE ALLEGATIONS OF THE USE OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS IN THE SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC

Following requests by the Syrian Arab Republic and subsequently by other UN Member States to investigate separate allegations of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic, the Secretary-General decided to establish on 21 March 2013 the *UN Mission to Investigate Allegations of the Use of Chemical Weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic* based on his authority under General Assembly resolution 42/37 C and Security Council resolution 620 (1988).¹ The purpose of this specialized and impartial fact-finding Mission was to establish evidence related to the allegations of chemical weapons use. The Secretary-General appointed Professor Åke Sellström (Sweden) as the Head of Mission. Upon the request of the Secretary-General, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the World Health Organization (WHO) put their resources at the disposal of the UN Mission to support its investigation activities.



The UN investigation in the Syrian Arab Republic

Pending agreement on the modalities of the Mission's deployment to the Syrian Arab Republic, the Mission monitored developments, collected and analysed information made available by Member States and undertook other preparation activities. At the invitation of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs and the Head of Mission visited Damascus on 24 and 25 July 2013 to consult with high-level representatives of the Syrian Government on the modalities of cooperation. These were

agreed upon in an exchange of letters on 13 and 14 August 2013.

The UN Mission began its fact-finding activities in the Syrian Arab Republic on 19 August 2013. Sixteen allegations of separate incidents involving the alleged use of chemical weapons were reported to the Secretary-General by UN Member States. On the basis of the sufficiency and credibility of the information received, the UN Mission decided to investigate the following seven allegations reported to the Secretary-General: Khan Al Asal, of 19 March 2013; Sheik Maqsood of 13 April 2013; Saraqeb of 29 April 2013; Ghouta of 21 August 2013; Bahhariyeh of 22 August 2013; Jobar of 24 August 2013; and Ashrafiah Sahnaya of 25 August 2013. The Mission used different methods for collecting and evaluating the credibility of information, which included the independent assessment and corroboration of background information; the conduct of interviews with survivors and relevant witnesses; the assessment of the symptoms of survivors; and the collection of biomedical and environmental samples for subsequent analysis. On 15 September 2013, the Head of the Mission submitted the report on the alleged use of chemical weapons in the Ghouta area of Damascus on 21 August 2013 (A/67/997-S/2013/553). The Mission's final report (A/68/663-S/2013/735) was submitted on 12 December 2013.

¹ See the Fact Sheet on the Secretary-General's Mechanism for Investigation of Alleged Use of Chemical and Biological Weapons.

The Mission's findings

The Mission concluded that chemical weapons had been used in the conflict between the parties in the Syrian Arab Republic, not only in the Ghouta area of Damascus on 21 August 2013, but also on a smaller scale in Jobar on 24 August 2013, Saraqeb on 29 April 2013, Ashrafiah Sahnaya on 25 August 2013 and Khan Al Asal on 19 March 2013.

Today, I note with deep concern that the team collected evidence and information corroborating allegations that chemical weapons were used on several occasions at multiple sites against both civilians and military targets.

Secretary-General's remarks to the General Assembly on the Final Report of the UN Mission to Investigate Allegations of the Use of Chemical Weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic, New York, 13 December 2013.



Syria lessons-learned exercise

The work of the UN Investigation Mission in Syria highlighted the value and relevance of the Secretary-General's Mechanism (SGM). As underscored by the Secretary-General in his statement to the General Assembly on 13 December 2013, "There is room for strengthening and improving the mechanism". The Secretary-General, therefore, proposed the holding of a lessons-learned exercise. Pursuant to this proposal, UNODA undertook a multi-phase lessons-learned exercise to strengthen the operational preparedness of the SGM by engaging various SGM stakeholders, including the OPCW and WHO, and by examining lessons gleaned from the experience in Syria.

As a result, a comprehensive report of lessons learned was prepared and widely disseminated and is available at <https://www.un.org/disarmament/publications/more/syrian-ll-report>.

The elimination of the chemical weapons programme of the Syrian Arab Republic

On 14 September 2013, the Russian Federation and the United States agreed to a Framework for Elimination of Syrian Chemical Weapons and, on the same day, the Syrian Arab Republic deposited with the Secretary-General its instrument of accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention. Following these events, the OPCW Executive Council, on 27 September 2013, adopted a decision for an accelerated programme to completely eliminate the Syrian Arab Republic's chemical weapons programme by mid-2014. On the same day, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 2118 (2013), in which it welcomed the decision of the OPCW Executive Council and expressed its determination to ensure the destruction of the Syrian Arab Republic's chemical weapons programme by the end of June 2014.

The *OPCW-UN Joint Mission for the Elimination of the Chemical Weapons Programme of the Syrian Arab Republic* was formally established on 16 October 2013. The Joint Mission, headed by the Special Coordinator, Ms. Sigrid Kaag, was mandated to oversee the timely elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme. Following nearly a year of challenging work to carry out its mandate, the OPCW-UN Joint Mission closed on 30 September 2014, although the OPCW continues to undertake the necessary residual activities required to fully implement the Resolution. The OPCW confirmed the complete destruction of all chemical weapons declared by the Syrian Arab Republic on 4 of January 2016.