

**Statement by Karel J.G. van Oosterom
Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the United Nations**

Thank you very much Mr. President.

Mr. President we thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive and insightful briefing. His statement was focused on the broader Middle East, however I will focus my statement on the most pressing issue at hand: the use of chemical weapons in Syria.

Mr. President, the UN Charter starts with the words: “We the **peoples** of the United Nations. “ And while the Russian Federation is blocking effective action of this council on the crimes of its ally, the Syrian regime, all **people** of every nation are outraged by continued unlimited violence committed by the Syrian regime against its own people.

As the Secretary General just said, the people of Syria have lived through a litany of horrors. No responsible government can ignore the universal outrage about these horrors. Our collective incapacity here in the Council to stop the crimes in Syria, should weigh heavily on the conscience of all members of this council.

But especially it should weigh heavily on the conscience of one permanent member.

It is our collective conscience that created this Charter. It is our collective conscience that created the Chemical Weapons Convention. The use of chemical weapons is unlawful in and by itself. The use of chemical weapons is a violation of the UN Charter. And the use of chemical weapons is a serious violation of international law and may constitute a war crime and a crime against humanity.

We strongly believe that the international community must fully uphold the standard that the use of chemical weapons is never permissible. As the Secretary General just said, the norm against the use of chemical weapons must be upheld. The non-proliferation regime must be upheld.

Accountability for Chemical Weapons use in Syria therefore is neither optional nor negotiable. The images of last weekend’s attack in Douma are appalling. Once again, atrocities have been inflicted on Syria’s civilian population.

Once again, dozens of innocent civilians were killed. Once again, hundreds of innocent civilians were injured.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands believes it is likely that the Syrian regime is responsible for the attack. The Syrian regime has a proven history of such attacks – in 2014, 2015 and 2017, when it used chemicals as a weapon against its own people.

It is unacceptable that four years after Syria joined the Chemical Weapons Convention, its declaration can still not be verified as accurate or complete. The Netherlands is a long-time supporter of fighting impunity when it comes to chemical weapons.

Regrettably, all attempts to achieve accountability this here at the Security Council have failed. Referral to the International Criminal Court was vetoed. Renewal of the mandate of the JIM was vetoed. And again this week, accountability was vetoed.

With its vetoes, the Russian Federation has assumed a heavy responsibility for the crimes committed by the Syrian regime.

Mr. President, the resolution for a new accountability mechanism that was struck by that veto this week, remains the bare minimum of what is acceptable to the KNL.

We will not settle for anything less than an independent, impartial attribution mechanism, so that the culprits of this vicious attack will be identified and will be held accountable.

No veto can wipe from our memory the clear conclusions presented by the JIM on the use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime and Daesh.

No veto can stop our compassion for the victims of the chemical weapons attack this weekend.

No veto can end our determination to achieve justice for the victims and to achieve justice for the people of Syria.

In conclusion Mr. President,

The Kingdom of the Netherlands remains committed to fighting impunity.

We re-iterate our strong support for:

- the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM),
 - the Commission of Inquiry (CoI),
 - the International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons,
 - and a referral of the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court in The Hague.
- That is the most appropriate path to accountability and justice.

The heart of our foreign policy on Syria is a deep desire for peace and justice for the Syrian people. Impunity can and will not prevail. And let me end with a warm word of appreciation for the Secretary General in his tireless efforts for justice and for the international legal order.

Thank you Mr. President.