

**Syria – Chemical attack – Statement by M. Jean-Marc Ayrault, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Development, following the Select Defence Council meeting**

Paris, 26 April 2017

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Ladies and gentlemen,

The chemical weapons attack in the town of Khan Sheikhoun, Syria, on 4 April killed over 80 people, 50 of them immediately; it wounded more than 500 others.

The victims choked to death after gas paralysed their nervous system. I told you a few days ago that France was convinced of the Syrian regime's responsibility in the attack and that evidence of this would be provided.

This morning the Defence Council examined the interministerial work which was carried out, and I'll talk to you about this now.

In view of the horrific attack and Syria's repeated violations of its commitments to stop using weapons banned by the international community, France has decided to share the information at its disposal with its partners – who were informed overnight – and the general public.

The conclusions published in the national assessment – which we will be making public today – are based on painstaking investigations and analyses by French intelligence.

This information allows us to draw conclusions on three key aspects of the Khan Sheikhoun attack.

Firstly, the nature of the chemical used, secondly the manufacturing process, and finally, how it was dispersed.

As regards the nature of the chemical, we now know that the chemical agent responsible for the deaths of more than 80 people is indeed sarin. Environmental samples and samples from the victims were taken immediately after the attack and at the site of the attack.

Moreover, this analysis has been confirmed by several of our partners and also the OPCW, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, which itself stated on 20 April that its own investigation had already concluded that sarin was used.

Moving on now to how the chemical was manufactured: we are reliably informed that the manufacturing process for the sarin, which was sampled, is typical of the method developed in Syrian laboratories. This method bears the hallmarks of the regime and is what allows us to establish its responsibility in the attack.

We know this because we kept samples from other attacks and were able, in what were obviously the relevant laboratories, to compare them. We are in a position to confirm that the sarin used on 4 April is the same sarin used in a grenade attack in Saraqeb on 29 April 2013, from which one of the grenades was retrieved and analysed by our services.

The presence of a specific chemical in particular – hexamine – is characteristic of sarin manufactured by the Syrian regime. This substance, typical of the manufacturing process developed in the regime's laboratories, is present in both the samples from 29 April 2013 and those of 4 April 2017.

Finally, as regards how the chemical was dispersed, samples taken at the point where a projectile exploded on 4 April reveal the presence of sarin. They demonstrate that munitions loaded with sarin were used. We know that the regime's air force, and in particular a fighter-bomber taking off from Shayrat air base, carried out air strikes on the town of Khan Sheikhoun in the morning of 4 April.

Only the regime has these air capabilities. So the presence of the regime's air force in the Khan Sheikhoun area at the time of the attack shows how it was carried out.

To conclude, there is no doubt about the use of sarin, and no doubt either about the regime's responsibility, given the production procedure for the sarin used.

I remind you that in 2013 Syria pledged to stop using chemical weapons against its people and even ratified the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Today it is in clear breach of this convention, ratified by 192 states in the world – i.e. nearly every state. With the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) marking its 20<sup>th</sup> birthday, it is up to us collectively – that is, the international community – to protect the chemical weapons non-proliferation regime. It is one of the foundations of the international order but also of our collective security.

The perpetrators of the Khan Sheikhoun atrocities and other chemical attacks will be held accountable for their criminal acts, not only in the courts but also the history books.

France, in coordination with its partners, will remain strongly committed to this.

Thank you./.