

## **Second meeting of the International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons – Closing speech by M. Jean-Yves Le Drian, Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs**

**Paris, 18 May 2018**

We're meeting today in an emergency session to discuss ways and means to respond to a major challenge: the return of chemical weapons use to the forefront of the international arena. The horrors of the last century made those weapons of terror a taboo subject. But, as shown by the attack plot thwarted a few days ago by the French security services, terrorism can now also take on a chemical form.

On 23 January we made clear commitments to combating impunity for those who use chemical weapons, because impunity in this area simultaneously creates a feeling of injustice and undermines the foundations of our collective security.

Since then, not only have our commitments been honoured but our partnership has also broadened. Indeed, nine countries have joined us. I want to pay tribute here to this choice and this commitment to reason and humanity. From the outset, we wanted our partnership to be inclusive. Before the press gathered here, I'd like once again to formally invite all those countries that reject impunity for the use of chemical weapons to join us.

In rallying together, we're sending a clear message: there will never be impunity for those who gas combatants or civilians.

In five years, 10 years, 15 years, the perpetrators of such crimes will have to face justice and answer for their crimes. We owe this to the victims; we also owe it to ourselves, in order to ensure our collective security. Our international partnership has contributed to this straightaway.

Our urgent mobilization this week follows two major attacks: one in Salisbury in the United Kingdom on 4 March and the other in Douma, Syria, on 7 April.

We've just had a most fruitful discussion about them, at a plenary session. Despite those two attacks being different in terms of their location and the methods used, they nevertheless have one thing in common: they both seriously undermine the foundations of our collective security by normalizing the use of those weapons. We must understand exactly what we're facing. In 2018, a new-generation military toxin was used in peacetime, in a public space and on the European continent, which suffered so much from the use of such weapons in the last century.

Above all, we assessed the events in Syria. In Douma, a whole population, including women and children, was gassed. These barbaric acts violate the fundamental principles of the rules of war; these atrocities trample on some of the oldest and most universal international conventions.

So we must take action. The excellent discussions we've just had were an opportunity for us to reach agreement on the operational measures to take. We'll take action, firstly, to ensure the international community rebuilds a mechanism tasked with ascertaining, in the event of a chemical attack, who the perpetrators are. This mechanism existed for Syria, but its action

was constantly hindered by the Russian veto at the Security Council. Only a tiny minority of countries – those which have used those weapons or which choose to protect the people who have used them – can be satisfied with such a situation.

For our part, we're on exactly the same wavelength: it's important to decide as quickly as possible to rebuild a mechanism for investigating and identifying those responsible for using those weapons. This mechanism must be autonomous in its methods; it must be free of interference by states; it must be made up of experts also chosen without states' intervention; and it must obviously be the only mechanism with the power to ascertain responsibility.

We agreed on the possibility of creating this mechanism under the aegis of the OPCW, whose reputation needs no further demonstration. I'd also like to welcome the presence here of a team from that organization, which has played an active role in our work.

Because of the urgency of the situation, an extraordinary session of the Conference of States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention should be held as soon as possible. It will note that the vast majority of countries share our concerns and that we're ready to decide to act accordingly.

Together, in keeping with our commitments, we've been working to share all the information we have available about the chemical attacks that took place. We've done so in particular with the UN mechanisms tasked with investigating all the crimes committed in Syria.

I particularly want to thank Mme Marchi-Uhel, Head of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism [for Syria], Mr Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, Chairman of the Human Rights Council's Commission of Inquiry, and the OPCW's representatives for their effective, resolute contribution to our work. Their presence here symbolizes the complementary relationship between international organizations and states which want to cooperate fully to guarantee the effectiveness of law and justice.

We also looked at the single, consolidated list, published on our website, of persons and entities involved in these attacks.

France is going to make public this evening a watchlist focusing on 50 people it deems highly likely to have helped develop Syria's chemical programme.

In the same way, in accordance with what we pledged right here, France has today adopted new decisions to freeze assets, applying to 12 individuals and entities involved in the transfer of sensitive material to Syria's main military chemical research centre, CERS.

Finally, we believe that over the longer term, it's important for the OPCW to be given a mechanism which would authorize inspections everywhere in Syria, including at non-declared sites, since it declares it has nothing to hide.

Our partnership has existed barely four months. It has already demonstrated its usefulness and effectiveness. We devised it as an operational instrument combining in an unprecedented way a response to the threat of chemical proliferation and a desire for international justice to be delivered. We shall continue to move forward along this path, on which international security and stability depend, alongside all those who choose to join us. I'll let Boris Johnson say the final few words./.