

**Statement by the head of the Russian delegation, Permanent Representative of Russia to the OPCW, Ambassador Alexander Shulgin at the 57th session of the OPCW Executive Council**

*05.04.2018*

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Mr Chairperson,

As you understand, we need to respond to three statements at once: the statements made by Bulgaria's permanent representative who read out the statement of EU countries, and permanent representatives of Great Britain and the United States.

We hoped to have a constructive discussion today. We made our national statement. It was balanced, thought-out and full of concern for returning the tense situation to the legal terrain and acting strictly in compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). We addressed the member states with a reasonable and composed appeal for cooperation. And what did we hear in response?

Suddenly, Bulgaria's representative takes the floor and reads out a statement on behalf of the European Union that contains a volley of allegations, such as that Russia is allegedly not responding to the UK's legitimate questions, that the Salisbury attack was with a high probability carried out by Russia, and much more in the same vein. We are hearing the same old unfounded accusations against Russia.

I would like to say a few words about how we view the speech by the British representative and then touch on the statement by the US representative. Strangely, our British partners made it look like they acted in strict accordance with the CWC when they demanded explanations regarding the chemical incident in Salisbury via the Russian Ambassador in London Alexander Yakovenko on March 12. This is absolutely untrue. I have to remind you that the questions asked by the British side were essentially an ultimatum to Russia. We were offered a choice: to confess to one of the versions made up by the British themselves, specifically, that either the poisoning of Sergey and Yulia Skripal was a direct act by Russia, or to admit that Russia had lost control over its chemical arsenal. Note their devious wording. Both options suggest that Russia has undeclared arsenals of chemical weapons. US Permanent Representative, Kenneth Ward, repeated the same assertions in his statement today.

First of all, I would like to say that the Russian Federation is an honest and responsible member of the OPCW. Back in 1992, a presidential executive order scrapped all chemical weapons projects. After its accession to the CWC, Russia carefully and thoroughly followed up on its obligations under this international treaty. Dozens and hundreds of OPCW inspectors monitored this for years. Finally, in 2017 we finished our chemical disarmament ahead of schedule, which was confirmed by the Organisation. I want to stress once again: Russia has fulfilled its obligations in full; we have nothing to hide. We have destroyed all our chemical weapons.

However, there is still one country which seems to be in no rush with its chemical disarmament and that is the United States. The Americans cite the lack of finances, of all things. We have disarmed ourselves completely while they still have a large chemical arsenal. Why are they saying nothing about this? Why do they stay silent?

I would like to return again to these notorious questions that we were asked by the British side. Nothing in the way of facts or even remotely reasonable arguments has been provided to Russia. Just allegations! And until we see the facts, we will regard all of this as a blatant lie. We waited and hoped that our British colleagues, after their first impulsive reaction, when they dared to deliver an ultimatum to a great power, Russia, will calm down and offer at least some explanations. We can understand that at first they obviously travelled in their minds to the remote past, when the “sun never set on the British Empire.” Regrettably, our hopes failed.

The British permanent representative was referring to a briefing at the Russian Foreign Ministry and statements made by certain Russian representatives. As for me, I would like to refer to the briefing the British held at their Embassy in Moscow. They invited the diplomatic corps and the media pool and it could be expected that the British would come up at least with some explanations or present at least something to corroborate their accusations against Russia. But no, emptiness again!

We have been told time and again that the nerve agent, Novichok, was only produced in the Soviet Union, in Russia, and nowhere else. Our military expert, Prof. Igor Rybalchenko, has just clearly demonstrated in his statement where these chemicals could have been produced; he has even indicated the laboratories and countries. This information is from open sources. You have just received Russian reference documents. You can find online all the references they contain and check all the formulas and calculations. This entire “chemistry” can be produced by any laboratory, provided it has the right equipment.

So, back to the briefing at the British Embassy in Moscow. Speculating about the Novichok-type agent, the British Ambassador said: We have no information that Novichok has been produced anywhere other than Russia; the conclusion is that the Salisbury Novichok was made in Russia. This is the kind of simple logic they use: We have no information, but take our word for it, because we know that this is a Russian chemical. How can they talk like that? They just have no information!

The British Ambassador was asked at the same briefing: Why don't you want to share with Russia the results of your investigation and the samples that you have taken? He replied: We have the bitter experience of cooperating with Russia on the Litvinenko case. I must tell you that their investigation into the Litvinenko case also consisted of nothing but assumptions of the “highly likely” type. They proved absolutely nothing. They failed to establish what had happened there in reality.

With regard to making the samples available to Russia, the British Ambassador said that Russia would study them proceeding from its national interests. Just think what he is saying! And why, in studying the samples, should we close our eyes on our national interests? Don't the British

care about their national interests? That's the kind of speculations we hear. It's absolute nonsense!

Finally, here, earlier today, the British and US representatives alleged in passing that Russia's motive was to kill off spies abroad and that eliminating traitors was a state policy. As he addressed his briefing in Moscow, the British Ambassador referred to numerous statements by Russian leaders. Mildly speaking, this is not true to fact and the Russian leaders have never said anything of the kind. I am addressing the British representative and the US Ambassador, too: please give us at least one example of such a statement. They are ready to preach to the winds, so let them stand by their words. Let them say, who and where said that the Russian leaders were pursuing a state policy that involved exterminating spies. It's a pack of lies!

Now the Bulgarian, US and British ambassadors are trying to convince us that London is a shining example as far as complying with its obligations under the Convention is concerned. But these are, mildly speaking, very doubtful assertions. Let us look at the Convention. Article IX, Consultations, Cooperation and Fact-Finding, makes it incumbent on States Parties to hold bilateral consultations on all disputable points. However, the British prefer to see this as an option rather than an obligation. Reluctant to abide by the Convention's provisions, they have invented a new format: "independent verification by the OPCW Technical Secretariat of the British side's findings." There is no such clause in the Convention. The British are toying with the CWC as they like, reading it this way one time around and that way another time. What is this? They are a State Party to the Convention! They must strictly follow its letter and spirit. Whom are they trying to mislead pretending they proceed from the Convention?

The British are clearly engaging in chicanery; they are trying to adapt the Convention to their needs by misrepresenting its provisions and are demonstrating an undisguised reluctance to cooperate on the investigation into the Skripals case.

Frankly speaking, I have been affronted by the remarks made by the UK, US and Bulgarian representatives. They are full of insinuations, inferring that Russia is lying, does not answer questions, that it is doing horrid things and, in general, is behaving unethically. As I listened to US Representative Kenneth Ward, I fully expected him to say that the Russian statement was yet another Potemkin village. The distinguished representative claims to know Russian history. He spoke about Potemkin villages before, probably at last year's conference of the member states, where he also kicked one more country by describing it as Russia's Trojan horse. This is the kind of language he uses.

This time again, he offered a similar description of Russia's initiative, which is based on the CWC and should have not provoked any reasonable arguments. This time he said it is a smokescreen. Just have a think about this! The situation is surrealistic.

We are being accused of being unethical. I would like to point out that we do not accept lessons in ethnics from those whose record is not exactly satisfactory.

The representatives of Bulgaria, the UK and the US all said that Russia is guilty of the first chemical weapons attack in Europe since WWII. This claim has not been proved. We have stated clearly and more than once that we have nothing to do with the Salisbury incident.

We have proposed investigating the matter. But they do not want this. They refuse to provide any information. They only continue to repeat their lies. Just stop lying and stop making up lies in public.

I would like to ask you: Who conducted the first blanket air strikes in the centre of Europe in 1999 without a UN sanction? Was it Russia or the US together with the UK and their allies? People in Serbia still remember with horror that hundreds of people, including children, died in these bombing raids.

We all remember how US Secretary of State Colin Powell held up a vial with a white substance at the UN in 2003, blaming Saddam Hussein of manufacturing chemical weapons, which led to the invasion of Iraq. UK Prime Minister Tony Blair claimed, citing certain intelligence data, that Iraq was developing weapons of mass destruction. He later apologized for the Iraq war. Today everyone knows that the vial and intelligence data were a hoax.

Today we remember the tragedy of Khan Sheikhoun, which happened a year ago today, on April 4, 2017. We observed a minute of silence for the victims of all chemical attacks, including in Iran, Iraq, Vietnam and Cambodia.

The truth about what happened in Khan Sheikhoun has not been established to this day. I would like to remind you that Ambassador Ward got nervous at the special session of the Executive Council in April 2017 when the Russian delegate asked that the photographs of the children with enlarged pupils who were allegedly poisoned with sarin be displayed on a screen. The numerous questions we put to the chairs of the Fact-Finding Mission – two UK citizens – have not been answered. We are convinced that it was a crude provocation staged by the notorious White Helmets, who are lavishly financed by the US and the UK – we know this for sure. In short, those who staged that provocation sacrificed those children. A day will come when they will be called to account for this.

As we see it, the Skripal case is a provocation against Russia that was devised long ago. We remember very well how the US, the UK and other Western countries, bent on overthrowing Libya's Muammar Gaddafi, flagrantly violated the UN Security Council resolution on the no-fly zone over Libya, which these countries had pressed for so energetically. They kept telling us that a no-fly zone must be established without delay to save the Libyans. Ultimately, we voted for that resolution. Do you remember what happened after that? And what has become of Libya?

On the other hand, London habitually violates its own rules. Our Argentinean colleague most likely remembers how the light cruiser General Belgrano was heinously torpedoed by the British during the Falklands / Malvinas War in 1982. The warship was sunk beyond the 200-mile maritime exclusion zone declared by the UK, taking with it over 300 Argentineans.

The absurd and incredible accusation presented to us by the UK, supported by its overseas partners, is remindful of the attempts to blame the assassination of President Kennedy on the Soviet Union because Lee Harvey Oswald studied in the Soviet Union and had a Russian wife. Solid facts, indeed!

In 2013, our Organisation received the Nobel Peace Prize, and with good reason. Until now, it has been the most successful mechanism in the area of disarmament and non-proliferation. All of us can see how, due to the persistent efforts of our Anglo-Saxon “friends,” the OPCW has been turning into a scene for squaring political accounts over the past two and a half years. The “collective West” acts in strict accordance with the Convention when reviewing the Syrian chemical file. Otherwise the West prefers to overlook the Convention whenever it finds this profitable.

By the way, the Russian Federation has been reproached for suddenly convening the Executive Council’s session, without talking to anyone. “Why didn’t you, Russians, contact us?” they ask. Wouldn’t it be wise to wait for the results of the Technical Secretariat’s technical assistance? Everything would then become clear.

And what kind of confirmation is the British side expecting from the Technical Secretariat? We have already asked this question. As British Prime Minister Theresa May has said, a Novichok-type nerve gas, manufactured solely in the Soviet Union and Russia, was used in Salisbury. Are they expecting the Technical Secretariat to confirm this?

Today, while sharing updated information, Director General Ahmet Uzumcu confirmed that the Technical Secretariat was working on this case in line with its mandate. The Technical Secretariat can only provide its findings on the chemical composition of the substance that has been used, without determining its origin and without blaming anyone for using it.

Moreover, it turns out that the highly professional experts from the British Porton Down laboratory have just confirmed the existence of some chemical substance, but they are unable to say where it had been manufactured. We have been saying from day one that there are no unique markers for determining the origin of a toxic agent.

In that case, one is inclined to ask what would happen if we wait for another week, and if we obtain the results of tests involving the chemical substance’s sample and its formula. It would be necessary to answer numerous questions, including how this substance was delivered to Salisbury, how it was used, etc. The British side will again say that this substance is from Russia. As for replies to other questions, they will tell us to view everything as an axiom. They will tell us to believe them, and they will say that any investigation is no longer necessary.

Supposing our British colleagues don’t want to directly work with us, believing that the Russian Federation is a rogue country. In this event, they can act via the Executive Council. It is also possible to establish an international expert group if they don’t want to act via the Executive Council. Incidentally, our draft resolution suggests this scenario. If they don’t want to establish a bilateral group, then it is possible to set up a multilateral group that would include their American colleagues. They can invite Bulgarian partners who would be only too happy to cooperate. Russia would also include some of its partners. If they don’t like this option, let’s convene a conference of OPCW member-states. The Convention stipulates all these options. In turn, we are ready to work actively for the sake of establishing the truth.

Mr Chairperson,

Today, I am speaking and listening to other speakers, and it's like talking to a brick wall. We are reaching out to our British partners and urging them to cooperate, to sort things out and to act in line with the provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention that stipulates everything. And here is what we hear, including just now from the Bulgarian Ambassador: Russia has failed to reply to the United Kingdom's legitimate questions, Russia refuses to cooperate in the establishment of the truth.

I am stating with all responsibility that Russia is ready to cooperate. We are ready to accept any possible scenario under the Convention. We are ready to cooperate with the OPCW or within its framework. But we are not ready to accept some far-fetched verdict that Russia is guilty. It appears that our British colleagues have already rubberstamped this verdict. Or, quite possibly, their senior partners from the United States have suggested this verdict to them. We will never accept this verdict!

We advocate an honest, open and full-fledged investigation of the Salisbury incident that a priori cannot be conducted without Russian experts. We will accept the investigation's results if they are exhaustive, and if they are based on irrefutable facts, rather than on something far-fetched.

Our British colleagues are sitting in their quiet offices at 10 Downing Street and saying that Russia has done this, Russia has done that, and that it is highly likely that the Russians have also poisoned the Skripals. British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson made a sensational statement that President of Russia Vladimir Putin had personally ordered the Skripals eliminated. He also blasphemously compared the upcoming 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia with the 1936 Summer Olympic Games in Nazi Germany! To be more exact, no Soviet athletes attended the 1936 Olympics in Berlin. On the contrary, British athletes greeted Hitler with Nazi salutes. I myself have seen such photos. People working with Boris Johnson should at least show him relevant documents before he makes such statements.

Mr Chairperson,

Some of our colleagues claim that Russia turns everything on its head. It has been said here that we should wait for the results of the OPCW expert analysis and then meet again and discuss the matter.

Actually, I suspect that our British and American colleagues are hiding something from us. They fear that the truth will out. Many of our partners from dozens of delegations told me off record that this dark story must be taken from the shadows into the sunlight, to determine what really happened honestly and objectively. But our British colleagues do not want this to happen. They want everything to remain as it is, so that they will be able to declare Russia guilty.

We will never accept the role of a scapegoat. We will not be held accountable for somebody else's crime. We insist that the OPCW rise to the occasion at this difficult time and play a positive role. The Technical Secretariat is chaired by Director General Ahmet Uzumcu, thanks to whom the OPCW has been awarded a Nobel Peace Prize. Mr Uzumcu is a man of experience

and knowledge. He must also play his part. We call on the Executive Council to adopt the decision we propose to conduct an investigation into this incident based on the OPCW standards. We believe that the Director General has a serious role to play in this.

Thank you, Mr Chairperson.

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