

Nerve agent attack in Salisbury, Wiltshire: UK statement to the OSCE

The Head of UK Delegation to the OSCE gave a statement to the OSCE Permanent Council on the Salisbury attack following the publication of the OPCW report.

12 April 2018

Mr Chairman,

A month ago, on 15 March, I tabled at the Permanent Council the attack in Salisbury, Wiltshire, involving an undeclared, Russian developed nerve-agent.

As a courtesy to participating States, I would like to update the Council on this attempted assassination that left Sergey Skripal, his daughter Yulia and a British police officer hospitalised and in a critical condition.

Thankfully DS Bailey has now been discharged from hospital and the Skripals' health is improving.

A painstaking and thorough UK investigation continues, working to identify the individuals involved in carrying out this attack and to establish potential criminal liability under the UK's 1996 Chemical Weapons Act.

In accordance with the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) deployed a team to the UK to collect environmental samples and to observe the taking of biomedical samples. These samples were sent to independent OPCW designated laboratories for analysis, in order to confirm the identity of the chemical involved.

The OPCW has now finalised its report, distributed it to States Parties of the Chemical Weapons Convention, and published its Executive Summary of that report. I quote:

- the results of analysis of biomedical samples...demonstrate the exposure of the three hospitalised individuals to this toxic chemical
- the results of analysis of environmental samples....confirm the presence of this toxic chemical
- the results of analysis...confirm the findings of the United Kingdom relating to the identity of the toxic chemical

and:

- the toxic chemical was of high purity

The name and structure of that identified toxic chemical is contained in the full classified report to States Parties.

Mr Chairman, I will remind the Council of the reasons for the UK government's conclusion that it was highly likely that the Russian State was culpable for this attack. These include:

- identification of the Russian-developed nerve agent

- the knowledge that the Russian Federation has produced this undeclared agent within the last 10 years, retains the capability to produce it and has investigated ways of delivering nerve agents, it is likely, for use in assassinations
- Russia's record of state sponsored assassinations
- statements, including by the Russian President, indicating that certain people are seen as legitimate targets

Also for clarity, and for the benefit of our Russian colleagues, I will explain why we use the phrase 'highly likely'. This is because in the UK it is for a Court of Law to deliver a final verdict on responsibility for a criminal offence.

The use of an illegal nerve agent in a British city was a reckless act carried out without regard to the indiscriminate public health consequences. The UK has repeatedly asked the Russian Federation for a credible explanation of how a nerve agent came to be used on the streets of Salisbury, and to disclose the Novichok programme to the OPCW.

What happened in Salisbury contravenes every rule in the international book, including the Chemical Weapons Convention and the fundamental tenets of the OSCE. This was a premeditated attack on the international rules-based order, and therefore, a challenge to us all.

Mr Chairman, this organisation knows better than any other about a pattern of Russian behaviour that seeks to undermine stability and democracy in our region in violation of international commitments and contrary to the principles of co-operation and common security. This is a pattern of disregard for sovereignty and territorial integrity, of attempts to damage the integrity of democratic institutions and the cohesion of democratic society, of cyber-attacks and of industrial scale disinformation that cynically seeks to mislead, distract and confuse.

I wish to thank so many colleagues and partners for the support of their capitals over the past few weeks. The strength of international reaction to what happened in Salisbury – including the largest expulsion of Russian intelligence operatives in history – sends a message that states are ready to stand up for shared principles and for common security; that attempts to undermine our region's stability and security have costs; that enough is enough.

Mr Chairman, on 15 March our distinguished Russian colleague asked 'who benefits'?

The answer is clear: no-one benefits. Not the people of Salisbury, who have faced serious risk and disruption. Not the UK government, dealing with the unprecedented use of an illegal nerve agent on British soil. Not the Russian people. Nor even, I would suggest, the Russian state, unprepared for the strength and resolve of the international reaction.

I do not believe any state seeks or enjoys confrontation with Russia or wants to throw away relationships and co-operation developed here and elsewhere over the past 30 years. Our challenge in the OSCE is to persuade our Russian colleagues to break the present cycle of disruption and destabilisation, and to rebuild trust through a return to respect for shared commitments.

Source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/osce-statement-on-nerve-agent-attack-in-salisbury-wiltshire>