Security Council Fails for Fourth Time to Renew Mandate of Joint Mechanism Investigating Chemical Weapons Attacks in Syria

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Due to the veto of a permanent member, the Security Council today failed for the fourth time in three weeks to renew the mandate, due to expire at midnight, of the investigative body formed to determine the perpetrators of chemical weapons attacks in Syria.

The draft resolution, tabled by Japan, was rejected by a vote of 12 in favour and 2 against (Bolivia, Russian Federation), with 1 abstention (China).  By the text, the Council would have extended the mandate of the Joint Investigative Mechanism of the United Nations and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) for 30 days.

It would also request the Secretary-General, in coordination with the Director-General of OPCW, to submit to the Security Council within 20 days proposals reflecting the views of Security Council members on the structure and methodology of the two organizations.

[The Council had been unable to renew the Mechanism’s mandate — established by resolution 2235 (2015) and set to expire at midnight on 17 November 2017 — when drafts for full-year extensions were rejected through three votes in two separate meetings (see Press Releases [SC/13072](https://www.un.org/press/en/2017/sc13072.doc.htm) of 16 November and [SC/13040](https://www.un.org/press/en/2017/sc13040/.doc.htm) of 24 October).]

Koro Bessho of Japan said that, despite all differences, there was agreement in the Security Council that the Joint Investigative Mechanism should continue to work.  He had submitted a draft resolution to allow for more discussion and hoped the proposed Secretary-General’s report would help to find the best way forward.

Those who supported the draft voiced their deep regret at its failure and paid tribute to Japan for tabling a neutral text that would address the concerns of all delegations and allow continuity of the Mechanism before it expired.  They vowed, however, to persevere in efforts to re-establish the investigations and preserve accountability and deterrence against the use of chemical weapons.

Nikki Haley of the United States said that, while the other delegations were working tirelessly to save lives from the threats of weapons of mass destruction, the Russian Federation was wasting time.  That country’s veto had shown that it would not allow the continuance of a Mechanism that put a spotlight on malfeasance by its Syrian ally.  She also pointed out that text in Japan’s draft was virtually the same as text included in the Russian Federation’s own resolution.  Yet, they had still voted against it.  She assured victims of chemical weapons that the United States and other Council members would keep pursuing justice for them.

François Delattre of France said that today’s vote was liable to weaken the international non-proliferation regime by exposing a lack of unity on the issue among Council members.  Matthew Rycroft of the United Kingdom and Olof Skoog of Sweden, as well, expressed their regret pledging to do everything that they could to ensure accountability.

Luis Homero Bermúdez Álvarez of Uruguay also expressed his strong support for the draft, as did Volodymyr Yelchenko of Ukraine, who pointed out that, commencing 18 November, such efforts would have to start from scratch.  He recalled that the Russian Federation had claimed it was responsible for creating the Mechanism; it should now bear responsibility for killing it.

Amr Abdellatif Aboulatta of Egypt said, as he had explained in past meetings, that his country wanted to maintain the important international tool and allow an opportunity to improve its methodologies.  He had voted for the resolution because it met those criteria.

In the same vein, Barlybay Sadykov of Kazakhstan said that the draft had addressed his country’s concern.  He offered to mediate so that a solution to extend the investigative work could be found.

Explaining his rejection of the draft, Vassily A. Nebenzia of the Russian Federation said he had participated conscientiously in all consultations designed to bring together the Council on extending the Mechanism.  He reminded Council members that he had informed them that he could not support a brief technical extension.  Nevertheless, the draft had still been put to a vote.  Any extension was possible, he stressed, but only if fundamental flaws were rectified.  It was not dignified for the Council to rubberstamp baseless accusations against Syria.  Nothing was preventing the Council from holding discussions on fine-tuning the Mechanism for the future, he said, underlining that his draft resolution remained on the table.

Sacha Sergio Llorentty Solíz of Bolivia said he had voted against Japan’s draft because all players would be repeating the same arguments in the future.  There was work to be done to ensure that the use of chemical weapons in Syria be duly investigated, and the Council must work on the situation until full consensus was reached.

Wu Haitao of China said that any Council action must focus on supporting the political process in Syria.  As there were significant differences on the current issue, it was imperative to exercise restraint and find a solution acceptable to all parties.  He had abstained, he said, because, given the differences expressed, the vote did not contribute to the issue of chemical weapons in Syria nor its political situation.

Sebastiano Cardi of Italy, Council President for November, speaking in his national capacity, said he deeply regretted the vote, but pointed out that there were still hours left before midnight.  In any case, the Security Council would continue to work in any way it could to allow the investigations to continue.

The meeting began at 6:22 p.m. and ended at 7:03 p.m.