National Statement by Sweden at the Security Council briefing on the situation in the Middle East

April 7, 2017

Permanent Mission of Sweden to the UN

http://www.government.se/statements/2017/04/070417syria/

Madam President,

Let me start by saying how heartened I am by the many expressions of condolences we are receiving from colleagues following the attack in Stockholm this morning. This is very much appreciated.

Thank you for convening this meeting. It is very important.

As we stated two days ago in this Chamber, the alleged use of chemical weapons in the attack in Khan Sheykoun was abhorrent and unacceptable.

If these allegations are proven to be correct, it will, unfortunately, be no surprise. The Joint Investigative Mechanism has concluded that chemical weapons have been used by the Syrian regime on at least three occasions. This latest attack only adds to the many other confirmed cases of international crimes committed in the Syrian conflict by all parties, most notably the Syrian regime.

Chemical weapons use is clearly illegal, constitutes a threat to international peace and security, and can amount to war crimes or crimes against humanity. There must be no impunity for such atrocities.

Madam President,

Sweden has been extremely clear that the attack in Khan Sheykoun must be condemned in the strongest terms; that there needs to be a rapid, full and impartial investigation to confirm the use of chemical weapons; and that those responsible for this horrendous attack must be held to account.

This is why Sweden has worked tirelessly over the last days to ensure the urgent adoption by this Council of a strong resolution on a robust and immediate investigation into this outrage. While these efforts did not bear fruit yesterday, we still hope there is enough common ground for this Council to move forward on a strong resolution. Therefore, efforts should continue and Sweden will remain constructively, and actively engaged.

With regard to the US air strike last night in response to the 04 April attack. It is important that action is based on international law. Last night's missile attack also raises questions of compatibility with international law. As the Secretary-General has said, restraint is important to avoid any risk of escalation.

Madam President,

Sweden has championed accountability for war crimes and crimes against humanity in Syria. We voted in favour of the draft resolution on accountability for use of chemical weapons on 28 February. We endorsed EU targeted measures against those implicated in the use of chemical weapons in Syria. We support the JIM, including through a financial support and technical expertise. We have actively supported the Commission of Inquiry (CoI), led by Prof. Pinheiro. We co-sponsored of the GA resolution to set up the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism that will, we hope, soon begin its work, and we provided support through an initial contribution of almost 400 000 USD.

Madam President,

Instead of exchanging accusations and insults around this table, we now need to come together urgently to reinvigorate the UN-led political process. Ultimately, the only way of ending the suffering in Syria is by achieving a sustainable political solution.

This will require a transitional political process based on resolution 2254. We reiterate our full support for the intra-Syrian talks under UN auspices in Geneva and the efforts of Special Envoy, Staffan de Mistura, who we look forward to hearing from next week. The parties must engage seriously.

Over the last days we have expressed our outrage at this latest atrocity, this time in Khan Sheykoun. Yet, every day the Syrian people continue to suffer the brutality of war in all its forms. It is high time to end the war in Syria. And that the Syrian people are allowed to determine their own future.

Thank you