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Aide-memoire to clarify the state of affairs as regards the so-called ‘Skripal case’

1. On 12 March 2018, Prime Minister of Great Britain Theresa May, addressing the House of Commons, said it was "highly likely" that the Russian Federation was responsible for the poisoning of former GRU colonel, double agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia Skripal on 4 March 2018 in Salisbury, with a nerve agent identified according to British classification as A-234.

The United Kingdom has publicly raised a question about Russia's "concealing" and "using" part of its chemical arsenal, thus alleging that Russia has "violated" its obligations under the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction (CWC) – one of the most effective multilateral treaties in the disarmament and non-proliferation field, which was initiated, among others, by our country.

Thus, the United Kingdom has come out against Russia as well as against the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) itself and the tremendous work that has been done within this organization during the last two decades, including with participation of the United Kingdom.

Pursuant to the requirements of Article III of the CWC, the Russian Federation submitted a full and complete declaration of all its chemical weapons stockpiles. That data was thoroughly checked and verified by the inspection teams of the OPCW Technical Secretariat. The fact of the full elimination of Russia's chemical arsenal has been officially confirmed by the authorized international institution – the OPCW.

2. On 12 March 2018, given the gravity of the accusations brought against our country, the Russian Embassy in London sent a note verbale to the Foreign Office of Great Britain requesting access to the investigation materials, including samples of the chemical agent that British investigators were referring to, so that it could be tested by our experts in the framework of joint investigation.

Thus, we proposed to act in accordance with paragraph 2 of Article IX of the CWC. It stipulates that States Parties to the Convention should first make every effort to clarify and resolve, through exchange of information and consultations among themselves, any matter which may cause doubt about compliance with the CWC. Under the provisions of that Article, Russia would be ready to respond to the United Kingdom's request within 10 days.

Unfortunately, the British side rejected that option and, instead of following the existing norms of international law, chose to unscrupulously politicize the issue.

3. British Prime Minister Theresa May suggested that a special Security Council meeting to discuss the matter be held on 14 March 2018. Suspecting that London would play dirty, Russia insisted on making the Security Council's meeting open.

It is incomprehensible what the British side was trying to achieve by bringing the issue to the UNSC. This matter by no means falls within the mandate of the UNSC. It is quite obvious that all discussions are pointless until the OPCW gives its assessment of the Salisbury incident (it is important to know whether a nerve agent was actually used; if it was, how the likely origin of the chemicals was determined; what, and on what basis, actions were taken with regard to the victims, etc.).

4. On 14 March 2018, British Prime Minister Theresa May, apparently having come to senses, finally sent a letter to Director-General of the Technical Secretariat of the OPCW Ahmet Üzümcü (circulated to all OPCW Executive Council Member States on 15 March 2018) inviting the OPCW Technical Secretariat “to independently verify the analysis” of the British investigation into the Salisbury incident.

As indicated in the press release by the British Foreign Office of 18 March 2018, following the letter by Ms Theresa May, the UK’s Permanent Representative to the OPCW invited experts of the OPCW Technical Secretariat to visit the United Kingdom to carry out an independent analysis of the findings of the British Defence Science and Technology Laboratory at Porton Down in connection with the Salisbury incident. On 19 March 2018, OPCW experts arrived in the United Kingdom.

Russia expects the OPCW to make an official detailed account of developments around the ‘Skripal case’. We proceed from the understanding that the OPCW Technical Secretariat shall conduct a full-fledged independent investigation in accordance with all relevant provisions of the CWC.

5. Russia has more and more questions both in legal and practical terms. And we intend to seek answers through the OPCW.

Russia states that it has not used chemical weapons against Great Britain. We suppose that the attack on the Skripals with toxic chemicals shall be deemed a terrorist act. As Yulia Skripal, a Russian citizen, is among the victims to the incident, we propose cooperation with

the British Side under Article IX of the CWC.

We would like to ascertain the following issues.

Where, how, and by whom were the samples collected from Sergei and Yulia Skripal? How was it all documented? Who can certify that the data is credible? Was the chain of custody up to all the OPCW requirements when evidence was collected?

Which methods (spectral analysis and others) were used by the British side to identify, within such a remarkably short period of time, the type of the substance used ("Novichok" according to the western classification)? As far as we know, to do that, they must have had a standard sample of such agent at their disposal.

And how do these hasty actions correlate with Scotland Yard's official statements that "the investigation is highly likely to take weeks or even months" to arrive at conclusions?

What information and medical effects led to a hasty decision to administer antidotes to the aggrieved Skripals and the British policeman? Could that hastiness lead to grave complications and further deterioration of their health status?

Which antidotes exactly were administered? What tests had been conducted to make the decision to use these drugs?

How can the delayed action of the nerve agent be explained, given that it is a fast-acting substance by nature? The victims were allegedly poisoned in a pizzeria (in a car, at the airport, at home, according to other accounts). So what really happened? How come they were found in some unidentified time on a bench in the street?

We need an explanation why it is Russia who was accused on the 'Skripal case' without any grounds whatsoever, while works to develop the agent codenamed "Novichok" in the West had been carried out by the United Kingdom, the USA, Sweden and the Czech Republic. There are more than 200 open sources publications in the NATO countries, highlighting the results that those countries achieved in the development of new toxic agents of this type.

6. Even from purely humanitarian perspective London's action appears simply barbaric. On 4 March 2018 (as British authorities themselves claim) a nerve agent attack against Russian citizen Yulia Skripal was committed in the territory of the United Kingdom.

Russian Federation has demanded exhaustive information on the course of investigation into the Salisbury incident involving a Russian citizen (the Russian Embassy in London sent the relevant note verbale on 12 March 2018).

The United Kingdom is breaching elementary rules of inter-State relations and is still denying, without any explanation, Russian officials' consular access to Yulia Skripal envisaged by the 1963 Vienna Convention on Consular Relations. For more than two weeks

now, we have not been able to credibly ascertain what happened to our citizen and what condition she is actually in.

On 16 March, the Main Directorate for High-Priority Cases of the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation initiated a criminal investigation into the attempted willful murder of Russian citizen Yulia Skripal committed by dangerous means in the territory of the United Kingdom.

The investigation will be conducted in accordance with the Russian legislation and the norms of international law. Highly qualified experts will contribute to the investigation.

The investigators stand ready to work together with the competent authorities of the United Kingdom. We expect a cooperative approach of the British side.

7. In the UN Security Council as well as in the OPCW and at other international fora, the Russian Federation has been a consistent and insistent proponent of thorough, comprehensive and professional investigation of all crimes involving toxic chemicals, and of bringing perpetrators to justice.

We are ready to engage in full-scale and open cooperation with the United Kingdom in order to address any concerns whether in bilateral format or within the OPCW and other international instruments, working within the purview of international law.

As a responsible member of the international community and a bona fide State Party to the CWC Russia will never speak the language of ultimatums or answer informal and word-of-mouth questions.

The Western countries' action on the fabricated 'Skripal case' contravenes the norms of international law and the general practice of inter-State relations, as well as the common sense itself. Naturally, we run a detailed record of all that, and when time comes, those guilty will inevitably be brought to justice.



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