

## Advance team for UN weapons probe ready within 24 hours to deploy to Syria, Ban says

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Technical and logistical arrangements are now all in place for an advance United Nations-team to deploy to Syria to investigate allegations of reported use of chemical weapons, **Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon** said today on the sidelines of the Review Conference of the landmark Chemical Weapons Convention.

“I can announce today that an advance team is now on the ground in Cyprus, the final staging point to undertake the mission in Syria,” the Secretary-General **said** at The Hague alongside the Director-General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), Ahmet Üzümcü.

“I can report that the United Nations investigation mission is now in a position to deploy in Syria in less than 24 hours. All technical and logistical arrangements are in place,” said Mr. Ban.

“Mr. Sellström, he is also now on his way to Cyprus today,” Mr. Ban added in reference to Professor Åke Sellström, the head of the UN fact-finding mission.

“Now all we are waiting for is the go-ahead from the Syrian Government for a thorough investigation to determine whether any chemical weapons were used in any location,” he said.

The UN chief reiterated that this is yet another indication of his “strong commitment to investigate all possible uses of chemical weapons” in the country.

“Ultimately, this is about the well-being of the Syrian people who have suffered enough already,” he added.

The terms of reference for the mission were finalized in consultation with the UN World Health Organization (**WHO**) and the OPCW which continues to provide technical support.

The conflict in Syria, which has entered its third year, has already claimed over 70,000 lives and displaced more than three million people since the uprising against President al-Assad began in March 2011. Some 1.1 million people have also been forced to flee Syria and take refuge in neighbouring countries.

Earlier today, Mr. Ban opened the Third Review Conference of States Parties to

the Chemical Weapons Convention, the first UN Secretary-General to participate in the Review Conference.

“The Chemical Weapons Convention is a historic achievement in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation,” Mr. Ban said. “With robust monitoring and verification mechanism, it has achieved remarkable progress in eliminating chemical weapons. Our goal is now within reach.”

The OPCW, established to oversee the 1997 Chemical Weapons Convention, has helped to destroy at least 78 per cent of chemical weapons stockpiles declared by 188 members, according to its website.

Syria is one of eight remaining Member States outside the Convention, including Angola, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), Egypt, Israel, Myanmar, Somalia and South Sudan.