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# Press Conference

Department of Public Information • News and Media Division • New York

## **PRESS CONFERENCE BY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF SYRIA**

It had been 40 days since Syria had requested an independent investigation into possible chemical weapons use by opposition forces in the northern city of Khan al-Assal on 19 March, noted its Ambassador today, adding that his Government “might consider” broadening the investigation if France and the United Kingdom provided evidence for their claims and only after a credible and transparent probe was conducted in line with Syria’s request.

Bashar Ja’afari told correspondents at a Headquarters press conference: “you may have heard trumped up charges and fraudulent allegations” against the Syrian Government, including false charges by France, the United Kingdom and other nations that his Government had used chemical weapons against its own people. Such information must be shared with Syria as the main party concerned. But no such information had been shared with anyone, including Security Council members.

The allegations were part of an overarching media, political and diplomatic campaign of incitement against the Government, he said, adding that Syria had always maintained that it would never use such weapons.

He outlined the details of Syria’s request for an investigation in a letter addressed to United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon just hours after the 19 March attacks, and called the request a “serious and credible sign” of Syria’s commitment to investigate the incident and identify the perpetrators. Nevertheless, he said, following the attack, media outlets had directed all charges at the Syrian Government, even in the absence of any corroborated facts.

In that regard, he recalled the “ugly manipulation” committed by those who, at one time, had claimed the existence of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. The investigation into those allegations — which he said had ultimately been found to be false — had cost the Iraqi people millions of dollars. “You all know the rest of the story,” he said of that situation.

In Syria, he said the Government’s prompt request for an investigation had “deflated” the campaign of the hostile parties, leading to subsequent allegations by France, the United Kingdom and later Qatar. Those charges had been issued without even specifying a date when the supposed attacks had occurred. Indeed, Syria was still waiting to receive credible evidence on the allegations, as no situation could be investigated “just on the basis of letters”.

Syria expected that the United Nations Secretariat would not join in the campaign against it, he said, noting that “what happened in Iraq is still alive in our minds”; the region was still living the negative consequences of those false allegations. His Government was also still waiting to receive an investigation team, as per its 4 April agreement with the United Nations High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Angela Kane.

Nevertheless, he said, the United Nations Secretariat had been releasing statements that might give the impression that Syria was not cooperating with the investigation. He read from a letter by Ms. Kane,

dated 3 April, which he said confirmed that the investigation mission would study the specific incident at Khan al-Assal. He also read from Syria's own letter to Ms. Kane of 4 April, indicating Syria's willingness to cooperate and to discuss the remaining logistical details.

Syria had so far sent nine official letters to the United Nations in response to eight from the Secretariat, said Mr. Ja'afari. Moreover, the country was still awaiting the team of experts to arrive at the Khan al-Assal site, as the only way to uncover the truth was to conduct independent investigations on the ground. He reissued his request to the Secretary-General, calling for the mission to begin without further delay.

He went on to share "alarming news" from the northwest city of Saraqib, near the border with Turkey, where he said that armed terrorists had spread the contents of plastic bags, likely containing chemical powder, among crowds there yesterday. The victims and the wounded had been transported into Turkey for treatment. The international community would likely hear further allegations that Syria had used chemical weapons against its own people. Such accusations would only be part of the same strategy to falsely implicate the Syrian Government.

Responding to questions, including for more information regarding Ms. Kane's agreement to launch an investigation, in line with Syria's request, the Ambassador confirmed that Ms. Kane had indeed agreed, and he displayed her letter. There had been a "crystal clear-cut" commitment from the Secretary-General that the investigation would be focused on the incident that took place in Khan al-Assal.

The same correspondent asked why — if Syria had nothing to hide — it would not simply accept the entry of inspectors and "put the matter to rest". Mr. Ja'afari said that it had been Syria that, from the beginning, had requested the inspectors' visit. The Government had been asked to provide answers to 18 technical questions about what happened at Khan al-Assal on 19 March, and it had done so within 24 hours. Among those was whether there were medical reports, blood samples, footage of the incidents, testimonies by the wounded, and other evidence related to the Khan al-Assal attacks, to which Syria had answered yes.

Pressed further on whether Syria might consider expanding the investigation, he said his country had problems trusting its accusers because they were involved in supporting terrorist groups and working to destabilize the country. Moreover, France and Britain had been among the first countries to use weapons of mass destruction, he recalled, noting that the United Kingdom had dropped mustard gas bombs on Iraqis who had resisted British rule. Indeed, when someone had a criminal past, he or she could not be part of the jury, he said.

Asked whether Syria did or did not have chemical weapons, and how he thought rebels had gotten hold of such weapons, he said he had alerted the Secretary-General and Security Council last December about Al-Qaida's reported production of chemical weapons. The use of those weapons was not a red line but a "purple line", or a "blood line". There had been reports — as well as video proof — that Al-Qaida was producing chemical weapons, he added.

While many fraudulent allegations had been made about the so-called chemical weapons of the Syrian Government, it was important to note that Syria had been endorsing resolutions on the establishment of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East for some 40 years, he said. Meanwhile, the Israeli nuclear arsenal had become a major threat to the region and the world, and yet the conference on the zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East — originally scheduled for 2012 — had not ultimately been held.

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