

[Samples from alleged chemical attacks in Syria reveal evidence of sulfur mustard, sarin – UN official](#)

23 May 2017 – A fact-finding mission in Syria has found evidence of sulfur mustard in samples taken from an alleged attack on 16 September 2016, while samples from a 4 April incident have revealed exposure to sarin or a sarin-like substance, the United Nations disarmament chief told the Security Council today.

“We must not allow ourselves to become inured to the ongoing allegations of the use of chemical weapons. This is an issue about which the United Nations cannot be neutral,” Izumi Nakamitsu, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, said in her [first briefing](#) to the Security Council since her appointment.

Citing initial findings from the fact-finding mission by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons ([OPCW](#)), she emphasized that the use of chemical weapons by any actor – whether Government forces, terrorist factions or armed opposition groups – could never be justified, regardless of provocation or circumstance.

“Their re-emergence is indefensible and cannot be viewed as anything other than a violation of the most basic international law and a serious deviation from the internationally agreed broader path towards the goal of a world free of chemical weapons,” she said. “As such, this is not an issue to be politicized.”

She said OPCW has deployed a fact-finding mission on two occasions following allegations of chemical weapons use on that date in the area of Um Hosh, in the Aleppo countryside. Members of the mission have conducted interviews, collected testimonies and reviewed documents, as well as information provided by the Syrian authorities, she added.

While the prevailing security situation has prevented the team from visiting the site of the alleged incident, she continued, it has been able to review analyses of blood samples from two female casualties reported to have been involved in the attack.

They were found to have suffered exposure to sulfur mustard, as was a mortar handed over to the team by the Russian Federation’s Chemical, Biological, Nuclear and Radiological Team.

RELATED: [As US responds militarily to chemical attack, UN urges restraint to avoid escalation](#)

Regarding the reported incident in Khan Shaykhoun on [4 April](#) – she said that, after a preliminary assessment, a fact-finding mission was deployed to a

neighbouring country, where it conducted interviews and witnessed the collection of biomedical samples from the alleged incident.

It has also received biological-environmental samples from dead animals reported to have been close to the suspected impact point, attended the autopsies of three alleged victims, and witnessed the extraction of biomedical samples from their bodies.

She, however, emphasized that all materials and information collected were currently being analyzed, thus not final.

On the situation relating to the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons production facilities remained unchanged, she said that OPCW has verified the destruction of 24 of the 27 declared facilities, but the prevailing security situation continues to preclude safe access to the three remaining sites.

FEATURE: “We invest in peace”

23 May 2017 – More than 100,000 UN peacekeepers serving around the world will be honoured this month as the United Nations celebrates the International Day of UN Peacekeepers, observed annually on 29 May.

Every day, peacekeepers help bring peace and stability to war-torn societies around the world [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres

This year's theme – “Investing in peace around the globe” – resonates powerfully and personally with the military, police and civilian UN staff deployed in the field, often in places where peace has yet to be found.

“Every day, peacekeepers help bring peace and stability to war-torn societies around the world,” Secretary-General António Guterres said in a [video message](#) for the Day, outlining various tasks such as protecting civilians in harm's way, promoting human rights and the rule of law, removing landmines, advancing negotiations and securing a better future in the places they are deployed.

“Now, more than ever, it is essential that we continue investing in peace around the world,” he stressed.

The communities in which UN peacekeepers serve can count on people such as Lt. Ramirez, liaison officer in South Sudan, to ensure that security is guaranteed to go about their duty:

VIDEO: Lt. Eduardo Francia Ramirez explains how his work as a liaison officer in the UN Mission in South Sudan is an investment for peace.

Over 120 Member States contribute uniformed personnel to 16 UN missions worldwide, which operate on a budget that is less than 0.5 per cent of global military spending. Every mission aims to save lives, prevent mass atrocities, set the stage for peace and then close.

While attention is often focused on the role of the military within UN peace operations, the part played by political, civil affairs, police, human rights and community-focused initiatives, as explained by some of the staff themselves, are equally vital.

Anna Innocenti is a human rights officer with the UN mission in Haiti:

VIDEO: Human rights officer in Haiti, Anna Innocenti describes the life in a peacekeeping mission and how it is an investment for peace.

To date, 54 missions have already completed their mandates and closed; two more will do so in the months ahead.

Ben Zakour Man, a child protection officer with the UN mission in the Central African Republic, discusses why peacekeeping works.

VIDEO: Child protection officer in the Central African Republic, Ben Zakour Man tells us how peacekeeping is an investment for peace

Peacekeeping is a partnership between the UN, Member States and regional organizations that support each other. In Somalia, for example, there is a peacekeeping mission run by the African Union, with UN support and European funding.

VIDEO: Alain-Pierre works for UN Support mission in Somalia. He explains why partnership is an investment for peace.

Their personal stories

Since the first UN deployment in 1948, more than one million men and women have served under the UN flag with distinction and courage. During that period, over 3,500 of them have lost their lives in the service of peace.

Several current peacekeepers share their personal stories on why they chose to serve this noble mission.

News Tracker: past stories on this issue

[INTERVIEW: 'Our peacekeepers are saving lives every day' – new UN peacekeeping chief](#)

UN resilience ‘scorecard’ to help cities curb disaster losses from climate change, other risk drivers

23 May 2017 – As world leaders and civil society representatives gather today in Cancun, Mexico, for a biennial United Nations forum on preventing and mitigating disaster impacts, the UN today launched an updated plan to increase the number of cities and towns with the capacity to reduce their disaster losses by 2020.

Announcing a major revision to its Disaster Resilience Scorecard, the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction ([UNISDR](#)) said the changes bring the mechanism into alignment with the [Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction](#), the global plan for reducing disaster losses.

It is a major boost to the goal of having more strategies in place at local level for reducing disaster losses from climate change and other risk drivers. This is a key area of focus this week at the UN’s biennial [Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction](#) where the Scorecard was launched today. Plans are in place to have 200 cities using it by the end of the year.

“National governments have the primary responsibility of implementing the Sendai Framework working with many stakeholders, and the Scorecard is a valuable support to this work at the local level,” pointed out UNISDR chief Robert Glasser.

UNISDR noted that the revision was undertaken by its private sector partners, American firms AECOM and IBM, with the support of the European Commission and USAID. It follows a pilot project undertaken by 35 cities that are members of the UNISDR Making Cities Resilient Campaign which comprises over 3,500 cities worldwide.

Ms. Kathy Oldham, Head of Civil Contingencies and Resilience Unit, Association of Greater Manchester Authorities, of the United Kingdom, commented that: “using the Disaster Resilience Scorecard gave us the opportunity to broaden and deepen our understanding of resilience, bringing together partners from across the city region in conversations to explore the different issues the Scorecard highlights.”

Other cities that participated in the pilot included Yogyakarta, Indonesia; Islamabad, Pakistan; Hong Kong, China; Geneva, Switzerland; Quito, Ecuador; and Kisumu, Kenya.

Losses due to disasters from natural and man-made hazards including floods, storms and the impacts of climate change are mounting and on average cost governments over \$300 billion globally each year.

The Scorecard provides a set of assessments that cover the policy and planning, engineering, organisational, financial, social and environmental aspects of disaster resilience. Designed to be led by local government authorities, the Scorecard aims to assist in monitoring and reviewing progress in the implementation of the Sendai Framework.

The Scorecard is a free self-assessment tool to be used by cities or local government agencies.

[Two UN 'blue helmets' killed in attack in northern Mali](#)

23 May 2017 – Two peacekeepers of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali ([MINUSMA](#)) were killed and another injured on Tuesday morning in an ambush in the northern Kidal region.

“A pedestrian patrol of MINUSMA was attacked in an ambush around 6:30 am this morning, five kilometres from Aguelhok,” the Mission announced.

Strongly condemning “this murderous attack,” MINUSMA, chief Mahamat Saleh Annadif, who is also the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Mali, said the Mission immediately deployed a rapid response force at the scene and proceeded to evacuate the wounded and the deceased.

“This attack adds to a wave of violence that, over the past few weeks, has targeted the civilian populations, the Malian Armed Forces and the international forces without distinction. The violence is aimed only at undermining [...] efforts to bring stability and unity to Mali,” Mr. Annadif said.

He went on to reiterate the solidarity and determination of the Mission to support the efforts of the Malian Government, other signatory parties and the people of Mali in the implementation of the Peace Agreement.

“MINUSMA is prepared to make all its contribution to the identification of the perpetrators of this attack so that they are promptly brought to justice,” he said.

Meanwhile, at UN Headquarters in New York, UN Spokesman Stephane Dujarric said [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres extended his condolences to the families of the fallen peacekeepers.

Ethiopia's Tedros Adhanom elected to top UN health post

23 May 2017 – The World Health Assembly, the decision-making body of the United Nations health agency, today elected Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus as the new Director-General of the World Health Organization ([WHO](#)).

“Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus was nominated by the Government of Ethiopia, and [will begin](#) his five-year term on 1 July 2017,” WHO said in a statement following the afternoon vote.

Among his previous positions, Dr. Tedros was Ethiopia's Minister of Foreign Affairs and, prior, Minister of Health.

He also served as Chair of the Global Fund and of the Roll Back Malaria (RBM) Partnership Board (RBM), where he secured “record funding” for the two organizations and created the Global Malaria Action Plan, which expanded RBM's reach beyond Africa to Asia and Latin America, according to the UN agency.

The incoming health chief was chosen from amongst three nominees presented to the World Health Assembly, along with David Nabarro from the UK, and Sania Nishtar from Pakistan, in a process that began before September 2016.

Dr. Tedros will succeed Margaret Chan, who yesterday addressed the World Health Assembly for the final time after serving two consecutive five-year terms.

In her final address as head of the organization, Dr. Chan yesterday urged WHO to “remember the people” behind the facts and figures, and took personal responsibility for the WHO's delayed response in 2014 to the Ebola outbreak in East Africa.