

Ian Henderson's Closing Speech
UNSC Arria-Formula Meeting 28 September 2020

This was quite an eye opener to me. Far from be it my role to castigate the distinguished excellencies, delegates, colleagues, but I'd have to say I'm bitterly disappointed, and having being around for long enough I did not necessarily expect anything different. There was no discussion. It was a series of political statements, and from both sides, and from my point of view, propaganda. But this is the world that we live in. This is the world that I was posed with in my time with the OPCW.

My role here now is to defend the OPCW and the technical secretariat. I'd like to make that very clear. Disinformation campaigns discrediting the OPCW - this has from my point of view got nothing to do with that.

I notice that there is still, and since day one on the Douma investigation there has been, no willingness or desire whatsoever to even contemplate the fact that there could be some science, facts and engineering that demonstrate an outcome contrary to the FFM report. To this day, no one, not one person - other than attempts from some anarchistic journalists - no one formally has approached me and said, "Can you tell me your experience of what happened," with the exception of one. After the Douma FFM report was released, there was something of a crisis in the technical secretariat. This was prior to the upcoming leaking of my engineering report. So prior to that, we were deciding what to do. I made it clear that the findings of the FFM reports were not supported by science or engineering, and I can make that clear to anyone who is interested in that. I was then invited by a delegation from one of the Western states' parties and I provided a full briefing. At the end of that briefing the gentleman said, "This is really serious. This is very big. It will certainly go higher. This will go very high." But then he said by way of apology, he said, "But of course, you realise we won't be able to do anything about this."

That's the situation I faced and I continue to face to this day. Out of all the statements made today, I believe I'm the only one who has spent a lot of time in Syria, including in Damascus and in Douma and other locations. I have had an involvement in all three of the Syria operational missions: the DATs, the SSRC and the Douma FFM.

Now I don't want to be naïve or overly cynical, but I noticed that many of the political statements were cut and paste, and that's the way things work, that's to be expected. But I do sympathise in a way. That's your job, and I can understand the panic caused by the possibility that there is a clear science, engineering, facts and information that called into question the Douma FFM investigation. Why? Because that's the only one, the first and only investigation where we, the OPCW inspectors, actually got to the site of the alleged incident, and we did our work.

Now thank you for some of your commendations for the impartiality, the professionalism and the difficult work often in dangerous circumstances. We did experience that in many missions, including Douma, but we are apparently not included under that because the

Douma FFM report was written by one person who'd only been to Turkey and another who had not deployed anywhere.

I'll now respond to a question implicitly raised by the gentleman from Indonesia, and let's look at - try and get - some positivity. What could be done to fix the situation? What did I experience that was clearly in my view a problem? It's not with the OPCW. It's not with the technical secretariat. It's a fantastic organisation and there are hundreds of impartial committed staff members who've made it the success that it is.

However, in the Syria mission it has very clearly evolved into something different from what it should be. First of all, the Syria missions are run by a handful of staff who report to the office of the Director General through the Chief of Cabinet, who reports - I have to say in my experience through observation - to some of the key Western delegations, and obviously the US Permanent Representative plays a leading roll in that.

The first thing to fix is that the Syria missions need to be subjected to the same professional peer review as the rest of the work of the technical secretariat. The single line of control through the Chief of Cabinet - the former being British and the current French - reporting directly to influential delegations cannot be allowed to persist, so that's the first thing to fix it.

The second thing is the reliance of the FFM and the JIM and the IIT on carefully selected external experts who remain anonymous and whose work is selectively cherry-picked by the FFM, IIT or JIM, to serve the generation of a result that has generally, if not always, been the expression of an opinion from those individuals as to what they thought was the most likely outcome, hence the use of the words that 'it's reasonable to believe that this is the most likely situation,' and hence the problem with Douma, where for the first time there is a clear volume of scientific, engineering, and procedural facts and information that will be used, can be used, to prove otherwise.

Which leads to the third thing to fix, is that these investigations in Syria need to have set a more realistic minimum standard of evidence. Now I put "evidence" in inverted commas. This is information, data, materials, open source or whatever, and these minimum standards need to be supported by science; and it's transparent science, not the selective excerpts from opinions provided by carefully selected anonymous experts.

I think I probably said more than I should already and my request remains out there. Don't believe me but just take it seriously enough to believe, as was the case in Iraq in 2002. I had a light-hearted bet on Iraq. My view was, no, sanity will prevail. We in the WMD intelligence information area, we know what the case is and it must prevail, it must get through at some stage. I lost the bet because it didn't and I hate to say I see the same sort of thing happening now. But again, as I said, the lockdown has become impenetrable, and it probably will remain that way.

So one or two final remarks. When I reviewed the DAT dossier during the preparations for the first inspections of the SSRC, having been around for much longer than many other people, and having been in the starting group of team leaders in the secretariat in 1997, we

were faced with all of the initial declarations from the possessor states. The level of inconsistencies, discrepancies, in their declarations, I found to be roughly the same as the questions I saw having been raised by the DAT on the Syrian declarations. There were mistakes. They were things that should have been declared and were only declared under pressure, such as ricin programme, and there were some aspects about the pinacolyl alcohol and soman detected in the SSRC, but none of these reached the level that would have, in the earlier days, have triggered this years of questioning and to and fro on these so-called inconsistencies, omissions, in the declaration. I will share with you some of the wording that was used by various people in the secretariat in reference to the DAT dossier. The wording was "Keep the file open." That was the primary thing. Keep the file open, keep the pressure on. Now I'm not going to pretend I have the political nous to interpret exactly what that meant to who it was raised by but in the absence of any progress I see being made I think I'll leave that thought with you. Thank you.