**US demands Syria withdraw as chair of anti-chemical weapons forum**

Times of Israel

May 26, 2018

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/us-demands-syria-quit-as-chair-of-anti-chemical-weapons-conference/>

The United States on Friday called on the Syrian government to step down as president of the UN-backed Conference on Disarmament scheduled for next week, citing the regime’s repeated use of chemical weapons on civilian targets during the years-long civil war.

US diplomats said during a UN debate Friday that Bashar Assad’s government “has neither the legitimacy nor moral authority” to lead global disarmament efforts. French and British officials also objected to Damascus serving as head of the Conference, with one diplomat from Paris calling the appointment “particularly cynical.”

Washington called on Russia to end its “blind support” for the Assad regime and urge Syria to withdraw as president of the conference.

“Syria’s presidency will undermine this body and demean this institution, and this is something that should not happen,” one American diplomat said.

During the debate, Syria’s UN Ambassador Hussam Alaa slammed the US, UK and France for bombing regime targets in response to the chemical attacks. Alaa claimed the three countries were “exhibiting selectivity and double standards in their approach to the international system to combat chemical weapons without taking into account the real dangers threatening the world.”

Later on Friday, UN chief Antonio Guterres told reporters that he did not have the power to override the rotation system that selected Syria to chair the 2018 conference, but said he hoped Syria’s involvement would not have a “negative impact” on international disarmament efforts.

The UN chief also voiced concern about the situation in war-ravaged Syria, and in particular the repeated use of chemical weapons there.

Guterres called for “steps to end and prevent the use of other weapons of mass destruction, especially chemical weapons.”

He pointed out that since 2014, a UN fact-finding mission had examined 83 incidents involving the alleged use of chemical weapons in war-ravaged Syria, and had determined so far that such weapons had more than likely been used in 14 cases.

“Each use is a crime under international law. Their widespread use may also constitute a crime against humanity,” Guterres warned.

Guterres announced the creation of a “new and impartial mechanism” for identifying those who use chemical weapons in Syria.

Assad’s forces have repeatedly been accused of using chemical weapons in the civil war. Assad insisted that his army gave up its chemical arsenal in 2013.

Last month, images of adults and children appearing to be suffering from the effects of a toxic weapon attack in Douma sparked international outrage. The gruesome footage from the apparent April 7 attack horrified the world and prompted unprecedented Western strikes on Syrian military installations.

Syria and close ally Russia have accused Syrian volunteer rescue workers of staging the video footage at the behest of the United States and its allies.