US Calls it a ‘Travesty’ As Syria Assumes Presidency of UN-Funded Disarmament Body

May 29, 2018

By [Patrick Goodenough](https://www.cnsnews.com/author/patrick-goodenough)

CNS News

<https://www.cnsnews.com/news/article/patrick-goodenough/us-calls-it-travesty-syria-assumes-presidency-un-funded-disarmament>

The United States led a chorus of condemnation Tuesday as Syria assumed the rotating presidency of the U.N.-linked Conference on Disarmament, calling it a “travesty” that a regime guilty of using chemical weapons against its own people should preside over the very body that created to Chemical Weapons Convention.

The U.S. and other Western democracies signaled a range of steps in response to the regime’s four-week long presidency of the Geneva-based CD, including downgrading representation and using the platform to highlight testimonies of survivors of chemical attacks in Syria.

“Today marks a sad and shameful day in the history of this body,” said U.S. Ambassador Robert Wood, moments after his Syrian counterpart, Edin Aala, called on member states to be cooperative and to avoid politicizing the session.

“Simply put, it is a travesty that the Syrian regime – which continues to indiscriminately slaughter its own people with weapons banned by the Chemical Weapons Convention – should presume to preside over this body,” Wood continued.

Noting that the CD was designed to advance nonproliferation and disarmament, he blasted the Assad regime for having the “temerity” to assume the helm.

“Given its demonstrated contempt for the work of this body through the repeated violation of treaties negotiated here, Syria has neither the credibility nor the moral authority to assume the presidency of the CD, the very body that negotiated the Chemical Weapons Convention,” he said.

Established in 1979. The CD’s agenda includes weapons of mass destruction, reduction of armed forces and budgets, and the goal of eventual complete disarmament.

Although not a U.N. subsidiary body, it is serviced by the U.N., and its budget is included in that of the U.N.

American taxpayers account for more than one-fifth of the U.N.’s operating budget.

The presidency of the CD rotates between its 65 member-states, in alphabetical order. U.N. officials facing criticism over the Syrian presidency say the world body has no power to change the system, which can only be done by CD member-states themselves.

[Ad Feedback](https://imkfeedback.intermarkets.net/adfeedback/form.htm?Plcmt=13183877&ATFlgt=div_utif_imkIncontent2&View=display&Refer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cnsnews.com%2Fnews%2Farticle%2Fpatrick-goodenough%2Fus-calls-it-travesty-syria-assumes-presidency-un-funded-disarmament&TID=62241)

Since the CD “conducts its work by consensus,” that is unlikely ever to happen. Members include the Assad regime’s closest allies, Russia and Iran.

Also among the membership are other autocratic regimes whose representatives on Tuesday congratulated Aala on assuming the chair – including China, Pakistan and North Korea. (Pyongyang’s delegate said he was “confident that your rich experience and profound knowledge will guide us towards more substantive discussion in upcoming sessions.”)

U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Nikki Haley said in a statement the U.S. would have blocked Syria’s presidency had the CD rules made provision for that.

“It should immediately relinquish the presidency, and every country that supports accountability for the use of weapons of mass destruction should share our outrage and join us in opposing Syria’s presidency,” she said.

Democracies have boycotted or downgraded the level of representation at past CD sessions, for example in 2011 when Canada did so during a North Korean presidency, and in 2013 when the U.S. and Canada did so to protest Iran taking the helm.

Wood said the U.S. would not boycott the current session, but would be present to ensure that Syria was unable to “advance initiatives that run counter to the interests of the United States.” It would also limit its participation during plenary meetings, skip subsidiary body meetings and not attend any informal meetings the presidency convenes.

[Ad Feedback](https://imkfeedback.intermarkets.net/adfeedback/form.htm?Plcmt=13183879&ATFlgt=div_utif_imkIncontent3&View=display&Refer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cnsnews.com%2Fnews%2Farticle%2Fpatrick-goodenough%2Fus-calls-it-travesty-syria-assumes-presidency-un-funded-disarmament&TID=21137)

Canada, France and Israel said they would not be represented by their ambassadors during the session, and Canada said it would use the opportunity to share testimonies of survivors of Syrian chemical weapons attacks.

Last year a joint U.N.- Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) taskforce accused the Assad regime of using sarin gas in a deadly attack in Khan Sheikhun in April 2017 – the incident which prompted President Trump to order a first cruise missile strike on a Syrian airbase days later.

The taskforce had earlier accused the regime of having used chlorine gas as a weapon on at least three occasions in 2014 and 2015.

Russia late last year used its U.N. Security Council veto to shut down the taskforce, and chemical attacks have continued, most notably in Douma last April. In response to that attack, the U.S., Britain and France launched coordinated missile strikes from warships and aircraft on the three regime chemical weapons-linked installations.

Under a Russia-brokered agreement in 2013, the Assad regime agreed to surrender its “declared” chemical weapons stockpile for destruction abroad. The regime, backed up by Russia, has denied all subsequent allegations of chemical weapons use.