

Five Former OPCW Officials Join Prominent Voices to Call Out Syria Cover-up

By [Aaron Mate](#)

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Prominent signatories and five former OPCW officials are calling on the chemical watchdog to address the cover-up of its chemical weapons investigation in the Syrian city of Douma, and to hear out the dissenting scientists whose findings were censored.

Five former officials from the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons have joined a group of prominent signatories to urge the OPCW to address the controversy surrounding its investigation of an alleged chemical weapons attack in Douma, Syria in April 2018.

Leaks from inside the OPCW show that key scientific findings that cast doubt on claims of Syrian government guilt were censored, and that the original investigators were removed from the probe. Since the cover-up became public, the OPCW has shunned accountability and publicly attacked the two whistleblowers who challenged it from inside.

The “[Statement of Concern](#)” is signed by five former OPCW officials, including the organization’s founding leader, José Bustani, and others including Noam Chomsky, Daniel Ellsberg, Col. Lawrence Wilkerson, Tulsi Gabbard, John Pilger, Lord West of Spithead, as well two former senior UN officials, Denis Halliday and Hans von Sponeck.

“The issue at hand threatens to severely damage the reputation and credibility of the OPCW and undermine its vital role in the pursuit of international peace and security,” the statement says. “It is simply not tenable for a scientific organization such as the OPCW to refuse to respond openly to the criticisms and concerns of its own scientists whilst being associated with attempts to discredit and smear those scientists.”

Pushback host Aaron Maté details the letter and airs clips of his and Tulsi Gabbard’s recent “Tucker Carlson Tonight” appearance discussing the OPCW controversy.

Statement of Concern: The OPCW investigation of alleged chemical weapons use in Douma,

We wish to express our deep concern over the protracted controversy and political fall-out surrounding the OPCW and its investigation of the alleged chemical weapon attacks in Douma, Syria, on 7 April 2018.

Since the publication by the OPCW of its final report in March 2019, a series of worrying developments has raised serious and substantial concerns with respect to the conduct of that investigation. These developments include instances in which OPCW inspectors involved with the investigation have identified major procedural and scientific irregularities, the leaking of a significant quantity of corroborating documents, and damning statements provided to UN Security Council meetings. It is now well established that some senior inspectors involved with the investigation, one of whom played a central role, reject how the investigation derived its conclusions, and OPCW management now stands accused of accepting unsubstantiated or possibly manipulated findings with the most serious geo-political and security implications. Calls by some members of the Executive Council of the OPCW to allow all inspectors to be heard were blocked.

The inspectors' concerns are shared by the first Director General of the OPCW, José Bustani, and a significant number of eminent individuals have called for transparency and accountability at the OPCW. Bustani himself was recently prevented by key members of the Security Council from participating in a hearing on the Syrian dossier. As Ambassador Bustani stated in a personal appeal to the Director General, if the Organization is confident in the conduct of its Douma investigation then it should have no difficulty addressing the inspectors' concerns.

To date, unfortunately, the OPCW senior management has failed to adequately respond to the allegations against it and, despite making statements to the contrary, we understand has never properly allowed the views or concerns of the members of the investigation team to be heard or even met with most of them. It has, instead, side-stepped the issue by launching an investigation into a leaked document related to the Douma case and by publicly condemning its most experienced inspectors for speaking out.

In a worrying recent development, a draft letter falsely alleged to have been sent by the Director General to one of the dissenting inspectors was leaked to an 'open source' investigation website in an apparent attempt to smear the former senior OPCW scientist. The 'open source' website then published the draft letter together with the identity of the inspector in question. Even more alarmingly, in a BBC4 radio series aired recently, an anonymous source, reportedly connected with the OPCW Douma investigation, gave an interview with the BBC in which he contributes to an attempt to discredit not only the two dissenting inspectors, but even Ambassador Bustani himself. Importantly, recent leaks in December 2020 have evidenced that a number of senior OPCW officials were supportive of one OPCW inspector who had spoken out with respect to malpractice.

The issue at hand threatens to severely damage the reputation and credibility of the OPCW and undermine its vital role in the pursuit of international peace and security. It is simply not tenable for a scientific organization such as the OPCW to refuse to respond openly to the criticisms and concerns of its own scientists whilst being associated with attempts to discredit and smear those scientists. Moreover, the on-going controversy regarding the Douma report also raises concerns with respect to the reliability of previous FFM reports, including the investigation of the alleged attack at Khan Shaykhun in 2017.

We believe that the interests of the OPCW are best served by the Director General providing a transparent and neutral forum in which the concerns of all the investigators can be heard as well as ensuring that a fully objective and scientific investigation is completed.

To that end, we call on the Director General of the OPCW to find the courage to address the problems within his organization relating to this investigation and ensure States Parties and the United Nations are informed accordingly. In this way we hope and believe that the credibility and integrity of the OPCW can be restored.

Signatories in Support of the Statement of Concern:

José Bustani, Ambassador of Brazil, first Director General of the OPCW and former Ambassador to the United Kingdom and France.

Professor Noam Chomsky, Laureate Professor U. of Arizona and Institute Professor (em), MIT.

Andrew Cockburn, Washington editor, Harper's Magazine.

Daniel Ellsberg, PERI Distinguished Research Fellow, UMass Amherst. Former Defense and State Department official. Former official of Defense Department (GS-18) and State Department (FSR-1).

Professor Richard Falk, Professor of International Law Emeritus, Princeton University.

Tulsi Gabbard, former Presidential candidate and Member of the US House of Representatives (2013-2021).

Professor Dr. Ulrich Gottstein, on behalf of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW-Germany).

Katharine Gun, former GCHQ (UKGOV), whistleblower.

Denis J. Halliday, UN Assistant Secretary-General (1994-98).

Professor Pervez Houdbhoy, Quaid-e-Azam University and ex Pugwash.

Kristinn Hrafnsson, Editor in Chief, Wikileaks.

Dr. Sabine Krüger, Analytical Chemist, Former OPCW Inspector 1997-2009.

Ray McGovern, ex-CIA Presidential Briefer; co-founder, Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity.

Elizabeth Murray, former Deputy National Intelligence Officer for the Near East, National Intelligence Council (rtd); member, Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity and Sam Adams Associates for Integrity in Intelligence.

Professor Götz Neuneck, Pugwash Council and German Pugwash Chair.

Dirk van Niekerk, former OPCW Inspection Team Leader, Head of OPCW Special Mission to Iraq

John Pilger, Emmy and Bafta winning journalist and film maker.

Professor Theodore A. Postol, Professor Emeritus of Science, Technology, and National Security Policy, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Dr. Antonius Roof, former OPCW Inspection Team Leader and Head Industry Inspections.

Professor John Avery Scales, Professor, Pugwash Council and Danish Pugwash Chair.

Hans von Sponeck, former UN Assistant Secretary General and UN Humanitarian Co-ordinator (Iraq).

Alan Steadman, Chemical Weapons Munitions Specialist, Former OPCW Inspection Team Leader and UNSCOM Inspector.

Jonathan Steele, journalist and author.

Roger Waters, Musician and Activist.

Lord West of Spithead, First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff 2002-06.

Oliver Stone, Film Director, Producer and Writer.

Colonel (ret.) Lawrence B. Wilkerson, U.S. Army, Visiting Professor at William and Mary College and former chief of staff to United States Secretary of State Colin Powell.

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Aaron Maté is a journalist and producer. He hosts Pushback with Aaron Maté on The Grayzone. He is also is contributor to The Nation magazine and former host/producer for The Real News and Democracy Now!. Aaron has also presented and produced for Vice, AJ+, and Al Jazeera.

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