Syria to miss deadline for eliminating all of its chemical weapons and production facilities

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Syria will miss the June 30 deadline for destroying its chemical weapons in violation of an agreement reached last September to avert a U.S. military strike, the New York Times reported today.

U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon informed the U.N. Security Council of that Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad’s government would not meet the deadline in a letter dated May 23, the newspaper said.

In the letter, the security general told the Security Council that approximately eight percent of Syria's chemical stockpiles were still waiting to be shipped out of the country for destruction, and that only five of 12 production facilities had been closed. The letter also said only one of 12 storage facilities remained open.

“It is imperative that the Syrian Arab Republic concludes the remaining removal operations as quickly as possible, as the authorities have pledged to do,” he wrote in the letter, according to The New York Times. “However, it is now evident that some activities related to the elimination of the chemical weapons program of the Syrian Arab Republic will continue beyond 30 June 2014.”
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The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), along with the United Nations, is supervising the effort to destroy Syria’s chemical weapons arsenal and production facilities. Syria accepted an agreement brokered by Moscow to dismantle its chemical weapons program after U.S. President Barack Obama threatened to attack Syrian military installations in retaliation for a chemical weapons attack on a Damascus suburb in August 2013 that left hundreds dead. Syria has repeatedly denied responsibility for the attack.

The secretary general also told the Security Council that he was waiting the results of a separate mission of experts that was investigating the suspected use of chlorine gas bombs in Syria in recent weeks.

A convoy of the OPCW-UN mission was attacked on Tuesday, forcing it to cancel a visit to the site in central Syria of one of the alleged attacks with chlorine bombs.

An OPCW statement said the convoy had been attacked two times, including the use of a roadside bomb and an ambush by gunmen. It was not clear who was responsible for the attacks.

All the same, OPCW Director-General Ahmet Üzümcü strongly condemned the attack in a statement, calling it “blatant attempt to prevent the facts being brought to light. This will not, however, prevent the OPCW from raising its voice against the cruelty of use of toxic chemicals to kill and harm indiscriminately.”

The Syrian opposition, who are fighting a civil war against Al-Assad’s government that has left some 150,000 people dead, claim that it is clear that the government was responsible for the chlorine-bomb attacks, which were allegedly made from helicopters, as it has absolute control over Syrian airspace.