

New OPCW whistleblower slams 'abhorrent mistreatment' of Douma investigators Share

A fourth OPCW whistleblower has emerged to defend the two veteran inspectors who challenged a cover-up of the chemical weapons probe in Douma, Syria. The new whistleblower lamented that other staffers have been "frightened into silence."

By Aaron Mate

<https://thegrayzone.com/2020/03/12/opcw-whistleblower-mistreatment-douma-investigators/>

12.03.20 A new Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) whistleblower has surfaced in response to a malicious and factually flawed [attack by OPCW leadership on two veteran inspectors](#) who challenged the official story of an alleged chemical attack by the Syrian government in Douma.

In a statement provided to The Grayzone, the new OPCW whistleblower described being "horrified" by the "abhorrent ... mistreatment" of the inspectors. The new whistleblower also warned of a climate of intimidation designed to keep other staffers "frightened into silence."

The official is now the fourth OPCW whistleblower to air serious concerns about the chemical watchdog's Douma probe. The Grayzone has independently verified the official's identity and status with the OPCW, and granted them anonymity to protect them from potential retaliation.

Their full emailed statement can be seen [here](#), and is transcribed at the conclusion of this article.

The first two whistleblowers – the inspectors – are veteran OPCW experts and team leaders who deployed to Syria in April 2018. A third staffer has dissented from the official version of events, but declined to make their views public out of fear that they and their family would be harmed.

The findings by the first two [whistleblowing inspectors severely undermined allegations](#) by Western nations and Syrian opposition groups that the Syrian government carried out a chemical attack in Douma.

However, OPCW leadership excluded their scientific work, re-wrote their initial report, and barred them from adding any further input to the investigation. The inspectors' evidence and the high-level campaign to bury it came to light through a series of leaks that began in May 2019. OPCW leadership has retaliated against the two by falsely portrayed them as rogue actors with only minor roles in the investigation and incomplete information.

The statement by the new OPCW whistleblower forcefully defends the inspectors and denounces the campaign by organization leadership to destroy their reputations.

“The mistreatment of two highly regarded and accomplished professionals can only be described as abhorrent,” the OPCW official wrote. “I fully support their endeavours, in that it is for the greater good and not for personal gain or in the name of any political agenda. They are in fact trying to protect the integrity of the organisation which has been hijacked and brought into shameful disrepute.”

One of the two whistleblowing former inspectors has been identified publicly. He is [Ian Henderson](#), a 12-year veteran of the organization and weapons expert. Henderson led on-the-ground inspections in Douma and conducted a detailed [engineering study](#) of gas cylinders found at the scene. He concluded that the cylinders were likely “manually placed” rather than being dropped by air – a finding that suggests the attack was staged on the ground by the militants who controlled Douma at the time.

The OPCW buried Henderson’s study and released a [final report](#) that echoed the version put forward by the US Department of State and British Foreign Ministry, strongly implying that the cylinders were dropped by the Syrian military.

The second inspector has not identified themselves, and is known only as Inspector B. This person is a 16-year OPCW veteran who coordinated the OPCW team’s scientific and technical activities in Douma and was the chief author of the main report – until OPCW leaders seized control of the investigation and rewrote its findings.

In [remarks last month](#), OPCW Director-General General Fernando Arias dismissed the pair’s scientific work as “erroneous,

uninformed, and wrong,” and insisted that they “could not accept that their views were not backed by evidence.”

In letters [published by The Grayzone](#), the inspectors rebutted Arias’ claims and argued, in B’s words, that they in fact “could never accept that a scientific investigation is not backed by science.”

The new OPCW whistleblower stood by the inspectors. “It is quite unbelievable that valid scientific concerns are being brazenly ignored in favour of a predetermined narrative,” they wrote. “The lack of transparency in an investigative process with such enormous ramifications is frightful.”

The official went on to suggest that fear of retaliation is preventing more OPCW officials from coming forward. “I am one of many who were stunned and frightened into silence by the reality how the organisation operates,” the official wrote. “The threat of personal harm is not an illusion, or else many others would have spoken out by now.” The official does not provide additional details.

Another OPCW veteran, who served in a senior role but no longer works at the organization, has also warned of severe threats to their security. In a letter [published by The Grayzone](#), the former senior OPCW official expressed alarm about a cover-up of the Douma probe and of the intimidation of dissenting voices. The former official described their tenure at the OPCW as “the most stressful and unpleasant ones of my life,” and voiced concern that “they will not hesitate to do harm to me and my family.”

In their rebuttal letter to Arias, Inspector B complained that Arias' public statements have left "so many obvious clues, that anyone within the Organisation (and among many delegations) would have no doubt as to [the whistleblower's] identities. Such recklessness has created a serious safety concern."

According to the inspectors, a delegation of [US officials visited the OPCW](#) to apply "unacceptable pressure" on the Douma team to place blame on the Syrian government for a chemical attack that might not have happened at all.

Both Henderson and Inspector B have called on Arias to allow for a transparent, scientific hearing where all of the suppressed evidence and studies can be heard. In their statement, the new OPCW whistleblower echoed the inspectors' demand.

"The lack of transparency in an investigative process with such enormous ramifications is frightful," the official wrote. "The allegations of the two gentlemen urgently need to be thoroughly investigated and the functionality of the organisation restored."

Full text of statement on Douma scandal from new OPCW whistleblower

As an employee of the OPCW I was horrified and simultaneously unsurprised by recent events in the organisation. The mistreatment of two highly regarded and accomplished professionals can only be described as abhorrent. I fully

support their endeavours, in that it is for the greater good and not for personal gain or in the name of any political agenda. They are in fact trying to protect the integrity of the organisation which has been hijacked and brought into shameful disrepute.

Unfortunately this is not a recent occurrence but a continuation of how the previous Director General and management group were operating. Working in the organisation has been an eye-opener and the cause of deep professional shame when I became aware of how a key element of the organisation was and clearly continues to be mismanaged. I am one of many who were stunned and frightened into silence by the reality how the organisation operates. The threat of personal harm is not an illusion, or else many others would have spoken out by now.

There is still no mechanism at the organisation to enable the calling out of irregular behaviour to protect the integrity of the organisation. It is quite unbelievable that valid scientific concerns are being brazenly ignored in favour of a predetermined narrative. The lack of transparency in an investigative process with such enormous ramifications is frightful. The allegations of the two gentlemen urgently need to be thoroughly investigated and the functionality of the organisation restored.