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**To:**

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**CC:**

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5. Mr. Antonis Samaras – *Prime Minister of Greece* (secretariat@primeminister.gr)
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**Joint Statement by 62 Scientists and Environmental Organizations**  
**regarding the:**  
**“At-Sea Destruction of Syrian Chemical Arsenal Threatens the Mediterranean”**

At any given moment, the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons stockpile may begin in the heart of the Mediterranean Sea, between Crete and Sicily. A severe risk exists that this process may result in the release of tonnes of toxic effluents into the Mediterranean Sea, posing a major threat to both the environment and public health. Countries such as France, Germany, Norway, Belgium and Albania – which possess facilities to deal with such dangerous waste – have refused to carry out the destruction of these chemical weapons within their territories due to lack of adequate infrastructure. However, **it is now being considered a safe option to destroy these at sea in international waters where control is virtually impossible.**

Furthermore, the dumping of hazardous waste at sea, an activity otherwise prohibited under international multilateral agreements, may be allowed for military vessels granted an exemption by UN treaties – a double standard that has been tolerated over the years by the UN. Moreover, the US has not signed the ‘Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal’ and this raises a question regarding the authorisation of the transshipment process unless this happens within a US military base. **The EU, which is contributing to the financing of this operation, and the UN should intervene immediately to identify safe disposal methods on land.** In addition, they should reconsider all plans to destroy highly dangerous chemical weapons with the use of pilot technology that has never been used before to such an extent, which risks poisoning the Mediterranean Sea.

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Despite reassurance about the safety of the destruction method from the UN and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), numerous experts from all over the Mediterranean and the EU are highly concerned. This is because of potential hazards from such a complex destruction process happening as a pilot case in unstable sea conditions. The process is due to last over 20 days during unfavourable winter weather. The method and equipment to be used is the Field Deployable Hydrolysis System, only developed within the last year, which uses large quantities of chemical agents to neutralise the weapons. This produces large quantities of liquid toxic waste known as effluent. The method and equipment being installed on the US military ship 'MV Cape Ray' has been tested only once on a boat, and just for the neutralisation of only a small amount of chemical weapons. This is in contrast to the large quantity of Syria's weapons that are due to be destroyed: over 700 tonnes. Furthermore, MV Cape Ray was originally designed for food and equipment transport over 36 years ago – ordinarily a military vessel should be decommissioned after 30 years. It is also not compartmentalised and built with only a single hull, which makes it inappropriate for such a high-risk operation due to the increased likelihood of an accident. The consequences of the possible dumping (accidentally or on purpose) of solid or liquid waste produced during the process are also of great concern, especially due to the risk of dispersal around the Mediterranean via strong sea currents.

As stated by Dr. Gidaracos, Professor at the University of Crete, Laboratory of Toxic and Hazardous Waste Management, "It is not acceptable, on one hand to request detailed environmental impact assessments and public consultations to authorise the construction of a simple sewage treatment plant, and on the other to carry out such major operations of treatment of dangerous chemical waste under rushed and unclear procedures, and informing national authorities via the media".

Questions have been raised regarding site selection for this operation: Why must the ship carrying the weapons travel over 1,000 miles from Syria to Italy, to an area where monitoring is virtually impossible, rather than remaining in international waters off Syria? Why is the activity located over one of the deepest sea trenches in the Mediterranean, which is an area with strong sea currents and a history of illegal dumping of toxic and nuclear waste, thus further complicating any effort to prove the environmental repercussions that may ensue?

Site selection was not made arbitrarily since many Mediterranean countries are currently facing a severe economic crisis and political instability, which prevents opposition by those most affected. OPCW, responsible for this operation, is exploiting these circumstances and risks turning the Mediterranean into a dumping site of hazardous waste. This is unacceptable and should be severely condemned by the international community.

**Time is pressing.** Our response must be immediate, as the at-sea destruction could be initiated any day now. Civil society organisations and expert scientists are requesting immediate action by the EU, the UN, and the authorities of Greece, Italy, Cyprus, Malta and other Mediterranean coastal countries. The process of destruction at sea should be cancelled and an appropriate safe land alternative identified immediately – somewhere where risks can be contained in a controlled environment and where the monitoring of potential contamination is feasible. Destruction of highly sensitive Mediterranean ecosystems and their resources, which are already under threat, must be prevented by all means.






**Signatories of the Joint Statement for the At-Sea Destruction of Syrian Chemical Arsenal Threatens the Mediterranean**








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LET'S DO IT! MALTA		<a href="http://www.letsdoitmediterranean.wordpress.com">www.letsdoitmediterranean.wordpress.com</a>	Malta
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