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ITALY

**STATEMENT BY THE DELEGATION OF ITALY TO THE OPCW
AT THE NINETY-SIXTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairperson,
Director-General,
Distinguished delegates,

I wish to congratulate and thank you, Ambassador Agustín Vásquez Gómez of El Salvador, for your commitment during your tenure as the Chairperson of the Executive Council of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), to ensure the efficiency and continuity of its activity.

I would also like to thank Director-General Fernando Arias for his commitment to the implementation of the mandate of the OPCW, as well as his staff, despite the difficulties posed by this prolonged pandemic. I would particularly like to restate our full confidence in the expertise, objectivity, and impartiality of the work of the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM), Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) and Declaration Assessment Team (DAT), as well as of the activity of the Technical Secretariat.

Italy is fully aligned with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union by Ambassador Rosa Batoreu of Portugal. I would like to focus on some issues of particular concern to my delegation.

While welcoming the steady progress towards the destruction of stockpiles of chemical weapons globally under the Secretariat verification, we reiterate Italy's concern that such heinous weapons have still repeatedly been used, causing pain and suffering to unarmed civilians.

To this regard, Italy condemns the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian Arab Air Force as per the findings of the IIT and looks forward to its next report.

Italy fully supports the draft decision entitled "Addressing the Possession and Use of Chemical Weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic" and urges all States Parties to support it in the resumed Twenty-Fifth Session of the Conference of the States Parties later this spring to protect the principles of the Chemical Weapons Convention ("the Convention").



In recent years, Italy has noted with growing concern the repeated use of chemical weapons in attempts to eliminate individuals in and outside Europe. These acts are unacceptable and intolerable since, in addition to being against principles and rules of international law as well as the Convention, they are, above all, a clear violation of the founding principles of the Convention and put in jeopardy the international non-proliferation regime.

To this regard, Italy reiterates its concerns for the poisoning of Alexei Navalny in Russia by a chemical nerve agent of the novichok group in August 2020 and urges the Russian Federation to transparently clarify the responsibility of the incident and to cooperate with the Organisation in the exercise of all its functions, in accordance with the obligations defined in Article VII of the Convention, which urges all States Parties not to permit in any place under its control any activity prohibited by the Convention.

Italy believes that the mandate of the Convention can be implemented only through a solid financial base and therefore it urges all State Parties to pay their contributions in full and on time. Italy also calls other Member States to fully support the upgrade of the OPCW laboratory into a Centre for Chemistry and Technology (ChemTech Centre) so that its tasks can be performed through the use of the state-of-the-art technology that they require. Italy appreciates the progress made towards the completion of the new centre. Italy commends and supports the Director-General and his staff in their tireless efforts in this regard.

Mr Chairperson, the activity of the OPCW has been affected in the last twelve months by the pandemic, therefore, Italy supports the efforts of the Technical Secretariat to find the most appropriate technological solutions for remote meetings or sessions of the Executive Council, considering security and cybersecurity as key priorities.

I would kindly ask you to consider this statement as an official document and post it on the OPCW external server and public website. Thank you.