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**RUSSIAN FEDERATION**

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR A. V. SHULGIN  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION TO THE  
OPCW AT THE NINETY-SIXTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairperson,  
Mr Director-General,  
Distinguished delegates,

Today's session of the Executive Council is taking place under the extremely complex conditions of significant restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. But the problems with the work of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) are far from being related to that alone. Unfortunately, our Organisation continues to linger in a prolonged state of crisis. And this is chiefly a crisis of trust, the lack of willingness to listen to each other and be heard; to be partners, rather than adversaries on the platform of The Hague.

Some States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention declare their dedication to the fundamental objective of ridding the world of chemical weapons and the threat of their use. Yet in fact, when it comes to the work of the Organisation, our colleagues—first and foremost the United States and certain European countries—do everything to ensure that the divide within the OPCW remains, and to intensify it, since they want to continue to use it for their own geopolitical interests. This kind of destructive position and an agenda saddled in every way possible with politicised items, has nothing to do with the predominantly technical nature of the Organisation's activities or with supporting an atmosphere of constructive collaboration, without which there are not and cannot be any prospects for achieving the object and purpose of the Convention.

There is no end to what is essentially a campaign of provocation unleashed against the Russian Federation within the context of the so-called “poisoning” of Mr Navalny with chemical weapons. Again, we hear accusations that are completely unfounded, and calls to conduct some kind of international investigation. Meanwhile, our numerous appeals for the provision of any concrete information about what was detected in the samples from Mr Navalny—which serve as the basis for this alleged “poisoning” of a Russian citizen with “a military grade toxic agent” that is not even on the Convention Schedules that were updated only one year ago—were receiving no response from Germany, France, or Sweden. We are being given a performative run-around, and nothing of substance is being said. In turn, the OPCW's own Technical Secretariat directs us to Germany, which should apparently grant some kind of consent. The Russian Federation, as is known, in accordance with paragraph 38(e) of Article VIII of the Convention, has requested that the Technical Secretariat provide technical assistance. This request has clearly set out the main tasks and parameters of the expected assistance that would



have made it possible to clarify the situation. In response, the Technical Secretariat required altogether unacceptable conditions for cooperation, in spite of the fact that determining the modality of assistance is the prerogative of the requesting State Party. In light of the need to explain the Russian position so that it can be better understood by the States Parties, we will be making a separate statement on that matter at this session.

The confrontational atmosphere that has become an exceedingly oppressive tradition is palpable even when reviewing issues related to the Syrian chemical dossier. The most recent pseudo-achievement on that front was the vote at the Ninety-Fourth Session of the Council that pushed through the decision on Syria's alleged violation of obligations under the Convention. Its authors had knowingly set unattainable requirements for Damascus and refused to put into action the mechanisms built into the Convention in order to deal with what are essentially their own fabricated—and frequently provocative—concerns.

Furthermore, the very same authors, in their loose interpretation of paragraph 7 of the aforementioned decision, are attempting—in violation of paragraph 36(c) of Article VIII of the Convention—to circumvent the Council and add as an agenda item for the Conference of the States Parties a draft decision of pre-arranged anti-Syrian sanctions based on all of the same dubious conclusions made by the illegitimate attribution body that was established in violation of the fundamental provisions of the Convention and are encroaching upon the exclusive terms of reference of the United Nations Security Council. What is particularly striking is that the majority of countries that are co-authors of this document are actually not members of the Council. In this regard, we insist on including an item on the agenda of the Ninety-Sixth Session of the Council to review this draft decision. Forcing through yet another anti-Syrian initiative will mean that with the attempts of the champions of the glorified “attribution” function, the Organisation is changing even more from a technical body to a tool used to exert political pressure upon specific States Parties to the Convention.

This type of sortie does not only take place here in The Hague, but in New York as well. One clear example of such is the resolution adopted by vote at the United Nations General Assembly on cooperation between the OPCW and the United Nations. Its authors did not even try to create any appearance of consultations on the text, but merely submitted a politicised document, chock-full of anti-Syrian sentiment. It includes the same passages that we hear at the OPCW: expressions of gratitude to the “attribution”—the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT)—for its work on the incidents in Ltamenah, the “profound concern” about the conclusions of this illegitimate body, and so on.

It is not so much these insinuations themselves that give rise to real concern, as much as the actions taken, when these take shape as IIT conclusions, which are drawn up and forced through by a vote here in The Hague, and interested countries make the effort to have them moved to the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council for consideration.

We cannot help but be concerned about the state of affairs regarding the “Syrian chemical dossier”, both as a whole and within its separate components. In particular, as concerns the assessment of the initial declaration of Syria under the Convention, the Russian Federation would prefer the kind of approach to work along the lines of the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT), which would have in the best possible way facilitated the search for resolving all of the outstanding issues with the Syrian declaration.

The official authorities of Damascus are demonstrating openness and unconditional willingness to work closely with the Secretariat, which is evidenced by the recent round of bilateral consultations. It is clear that with the political resolve of all those participating in this process, even greater progress is fully achievable. As the recent resolution of a number of important topics has shown, it is necessary not to focus on the negative, but to encourage as much as possible the positive dynamics on this track. It is necessary to stop deliberately delaying the removal of agenda items that have been exhaustively discussed, and with which it is impossible to make any progress. It is time to put a stop to working under “double standards” and not make demands of the Syrian side that are not made to any other States Parties. What must and can be done to that end is perfectly clear based on the example of cooperation between the Secretariat and Libya, when gaps were addressed in Tripoli’s initial declaration and problems were resolved related to the evaporation and leaks of many, many tonnes of chemical weapons precursors at the Ruwagha facility. We call upon all States to support the efforts made by the Syrian side and the Secretariat.

As concerns the Fact-Finding Mission investigating the use of chemical weapons in Syria (FFM), we insist that the work of this special mission must be conducted strictly within the framework of the Convention, in compliance with all basic norms and principles. It must completely stop with the baseless, dubious remote investigations and instead scrupulously follow the “chain of custody” principle.

The uncovered manipulation of the results of the report on the incident in the Syrian town of Douma has struck a major blow to the Organisation. This is also evidenced by the recent request from a group of prominent public figures and experts to the Director-General of the Secretariat, send on 8 February this year from the well-known NGO “Courage Foundation”. It poses a number of important questions about this particular chemical incident. We call upon the Secretariat to respond publicly to this letter to finally get to the bottom of what took place, as the silence and avoidance are casting doubt upon the work of the FFM on other incidents in Syria.

At the Ninety-Sixth Session of the Council, a draft decision entitled “Understanding Regarding the Aerosolised Use of Central Nervous System-Acting Chemicals for Law Enforcement Purposes” is being submitted under the “Any other business” agenda item.

According to its co-authors, this is being done due to the urgent need to take appropriate action. The haste and anxiety generated around this initiative sets a very poor precedent. Especially because within the OPCW, this issue has not been and is not being discussed adequately. One gets the impression that the co-authors have absolutely no need for a serious expert discussion, and that they are simply suggesting that they be taken for their word that this decision does not contradict the Convention and that its implementation will not have any negative implications. In other words, every effort is being made to force this issue through using politicisation tactics in violation of the provisions of the Convention on introducing amendments to this multilateral treaty in line with Article XV.

Another point of difference is the draft decision on the Rules of Procedure of the Advisory Board on Administrative and Financial Matters (ABAF). The Russian Federation has for a long time been holding an intensive dialogue with its authors: the Americans. In spite of our numerous attempts to reach common ground and the fact that some of our more modest proposals were indeed reflected in the document, an agreement on this issue has not been reached, and talks have reached an impasse. In this regard, we propose that the United States remove this draft decision from the agenda.

In conclusion, we would return to the issue with which we started this statement—something of fundamental importance. The Russian Federation, clearly, is extremely concerned about the fate of the OPCW. The continuation of the destructive process of the erosion of this mechanism for disarmament and non-proliferation is blatant. What will become of the Organisation if these centrifugal trends continue?

We call upon all States Parties to the Convention to seriously consider this and take steps to return to a dialogue based on mutual respect—without using labels—and on taking account of each other's interests. It is only in this way that we can begin to restore the authority of the OPCW.

We request that this statement be circulated as an official document of the Ninety-Sixth Session of the Council and published on the Organisation's external server and website.

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