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IRELAND

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR KEVIN KELLY
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF IRELAND TO THE OPCW
AT THE NINETY-SEVENTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairperson,
Director-General,
Distinguished delegates,

Ireland fully aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union and wishes to make the following statement in its national capacity.

At the outset, I would like to congratulate H.E. Ambassador Abdelouahab Bellouki of Morocco on assuming the Chairpersonship of the Executive Council. I assure you of Ireland's full support and cooperation in the work ahead.

We also wish to express our sincere thanks to OPCW Director-General Fernando Arias and the Technical Secretariat for their exceptional work, professionalism and expertise. Their continued commitment to furthering the work of the OPCW has ensured the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (hereinafter "the Convention") despite the ongoing challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ireland condemns any and all uses of chemical weapons and seeks accountability for those who use them. Any use of chemical weapons is a breach of international law, and perpetrators must be identified and held accountable. As a State Party to the Convention and as a member of the United Nations Security Council, Ireland will continue efforts to maintain a clearheaded focus on chemical weapons and fight against impunity for those who fail to respect their obligations and commitments under the Convention.

Ireland supported the decision adopted by the Twenty-Fifth Conference of the States Parties to the Convention suspending certain rights and privileges of the Syrian Arab Republic. The decision was a proportionate response to the Syrian Arab Republic's repeated failure to comply with Convention. Such persistent non-compliance demands an appropriate response and was necessary to uphold and protect the integrity of the Convention itself. This decision further demonstrates that the international community cannot and will not tolerate impunity in the use of chemical weapons.

When the Syrian Arab Republic acceded to the Convention, and its Verification Annex, it assumed clear legal commitments and obligations. The OPCW was mandated to conduct inspections, including of sites and facilities as necessary, to ensure that the Syrian Arab



Republic was meeting these obligations. Even after seven years, serious gaps and inconsistencies remain in the Syrian Arab Republic's initial declaration, its cooperation with the OPCW and its investigative missions has been regrettably sporadic and limited.

Even more alarming is the clear, documented pattern of chemical weapons use in the Syrian Arab Republic since 2013. We now have multiple reports from the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) and the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT), which collectively have attributed the use of chemical weapons to the authorities of the Syrian Arab Republic on multiple occasions.

The most recent report from the IIT attributing the use of chemical weapons in Saraqib in February 2018 to the Syrian Arab Air Force is the latest in a series of deeply worrying reports which demand a response. Impunity deprives victims of justice, emboldens perpetrators and undermines the Convention itself. As a State Parties to the Convention, it is incumbent upon each of us to uphold the Convention and the prohibition on the use of chemical weapons.

The establishment of the IIT was an important first step in efforts to uphold the international norm against chemical weapon use, and to ensure accountability for these attacks. We thank the IIT Coordinator Mr Santiago Oñate and commend the ongoing work of the IIT team.

Ireland has the utmost confidence in the work of the Technical Secretariat and the IIT. Attempts to undermine or discredit their expertise, impartiality and professionalism threatens the very bedrock of the Convention. Ireland is pleased to have contributed EUR 100,000 to the trust fund for Syria missions so that this vital work may continue.

Ireland is deeply concerned by the sharp rise in chemical weapons attacks in recent years, and the impunity of perpetrators.

We reiterate our condemnation of the poisoning of Russian opposition leader Mr Alexei Navalny, which constitutes a serious breach of international law and international human rights standards. The confirmation by multiple independent laboratories that a nerve agent from the novichok group was used to poison Mr Navalny is deeply worrying. We are disappointed that the Russian Federation appears to have withdrawn its request for the technical assistance visit from the Technical Secretariat of the OPCW. We strongly encourage re-engagement with the OPCW to ensure those responsible can be held to account.

Ireland supports the European Union's restrictive measures against a number of Russian individuals for inducing and providing support in the poisoning of Mr Navalny, and other uses of chemical weapons.

The last year has demonstrated the importance of the continued work of the OPCW even in the face of unprecedented challenges. The need to agree standard contingency measures should we face such an emergency again is clear. That is why we are pleased to support Germany in their efforts to achieve a consensus-based decision on convening Executive Council meetings in emergency circumstances. We strongly encourage all States Parties to consider the current proposed text constructively.

Financial stability and confidence in financial processes are also crucial to the effective implementation of the Convention. We call on all Member States to ensure their assessed

contributions are paid in full and on time, and to engage in a constructive manner in discussions on the first biennial Draft Programme and Budget presented by the Director-General.

We welcome the decision to establish a cross regional working group to consider the manner of appointment of the External Auditor in the future. The role of the External Auditor is crucial to the effectiveness of the Organisation and Ireland believes that any nomination for the External Auditor of the OPCW should be based on the technical merit and cost effectiveness of the candidate.

Ireland will continue to work with all partners and through the International Partnership Against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons to uphold the core values of our Convention. We commend the work of the OPCW and recognise the professionalism, expertise, and tireless commitment of the Director-General, and the Organisation. We call on all States Parties to the Convention to honour their commitments and obligations faithfully.

I would kindly ask that this statement be issued as an official document and placed on the OPCW's public website.

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