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SLOVENIA

**STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE EUROPEAN UNION
DELIVERED BY H.E. AMBASSADOR SANJA ŠTIGLIC
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA TO THE
OPCW AT THE NINETY-EIGHTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairperson,
Mr Director-General,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I have the honour of speaking on behalf of the European Union.

The candidate countries Albania, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia, and Turkey, together with the European Free Trade Association countries Iceland and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, and Georgia and Ukraine align themselves with this statement.

Andorra, Monaco, and San Marino also associate themselves with this statement.

The European Union would like to thank you for guiding the preparatory work for this Ninety-Eighth Session of the Executive Council in an effective manner. I would like to assure you of our full support in steering the work of the Executive Council in the months to come. I would also like to express our gratitude to all the facilitators for their efforts in taking issues forward under exceptional circumstances.

We take this opportunity to thank the OPCW Director-General Ambassador Fernando Arias and his staff for their efforts to ensure the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (“the Convention”) in spite of the ongoing challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. We commend the Director-General for his strong leadership in directing the work of the OPCW Technical Secretariat (the Secretariat) from the beginning of his tenure, including his efforts aiming at achieving a more diverse and representative Secretariat. In this context, we commend the Director-General for his efforts to enhance gender mainstreaming, welcome the gender audit carried out in the Spring of 2021, and look forward to receiving a presentation on its results.

The European Union lends its full support to the re-appointment of Ambassador Arias for a second term in office. Taking into account the many challenges facing the Convention, as well as the need for continued effort towards its implementation, the European Union considers that Ambassador Arias is the most qualified person to lead the Organisation.



The use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere, at any time, and under any circumstance is a violation of international law and can amount to the most serious crimes of international concern, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. The re-emergence of chemical weapons is one of the most urgent threats to international peace and security and has to be dealt with firmly and collectively. The European Union urges all States Parties to live up to their responsibility to protect the integrity of the Convention, a key instrument of the international non-proliferation and disarmament regime, and to uphold the global chemical weapons non-use norm.

The Decision adopted by the Twenty-Fifth Conference of the States Parties to the Convention (“the Conference”) suspending the voting rights and privileges of the Syrian Arab Republic due to Syria’s failure to comply with the Convention is a strong message sent by the international community against impunity for the use of chemical weapons, and in defence of international law and international humanitarian law.

The European Union welcomes this decision and considers it an appropriate response by the Conference to the clear violation of the core principles of the Convention by the Syrian Arab Republic. This decision comes eight years after the adoption of United Nations Security Council resolution 2118 (2013) and is a consequence of Syria’s continued failure to fully declare and destroy its chemical weapons programme.

The Syrian regime’s failure to respect its international obligations under the Convention is substantiated through the comprehensive and thorough investigations carried out by the Joint United Nations – OPCW Investigation Mechanism (JIM) as well as the OPCW Declaration Assessment Team (DAT), Fact-Finding Missions (FFM), and the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT). The European Union strongly condemns the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian Arab Air Force in Ltamenah in March 2017 and in Saraqib in February 2018, as concluded by the OPCW IIT reports.

The European Union urges the Syrian Arab Republic to declare the full extent of its chemical weapons programme and return to full compliance with the Convention. We urge Syria to provide the relevant information to the Secretariat in order to resolve the pending issues.

The European Union commends the work of the Secretariat on all aspects of the Syrian chemical weapons programme. In this context, we value the confidential Secretariat briefings to States Parties on their ongoing work and working methods. We also commend the Director-General’s continuous efforts to engage with the Syrian Arab Republic, and we note that Syria has appointed a representative to engage in preparations. We urge Syria to act swiftly in response to the Director-General’s outreach, and we encourage Syria to constructively engage with the Secretariat and to ensure that progress is achieved, including on the question of the timely issuance of visas for OPCW staff, as there is no alternative to cooperation.

The European Union looks forward to the continuation of the work of the IIT and the release of its next report, and is determined to ensure full follow-up on all findings. We have already imposed restrictive measures on five senior Syrian officials and scientists and one entity for their role in the development and use of chemical weapons. We are ready to consider introducing further measures as appropriate, and will continue to work towards ensuring full accountability for those responsible for these egregious crimes.

The European Union and its Member States will continue to work at national and international levels in order to address chemical weapons attacks and other atrocities committed in the Syrian Arab Republic. The European Union also continues to support collective efforts to ensure accountability for the perpetrators of chemical attacks through the International Partnership Against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons.

Addressing the threat from chemical weapons use is a key item on the Executive Council's agenda and is essential for upholding international norms related to chemical weapons use. The European Union once again reiterates its strong concerns that the Russian Federation has not reacted to international calls to thoroughly, and in full transparency, investigate the assassination attempt on the Russian opposition politician Mr Alexei Navalny, who was poisoned in Russia by a military chemical nerve agent of the novichok group in August 2020—a substance developed by Russia. The European Union has condemned the poisoning in the strongest possible terms. The poisoning has been confirmed, beyond doubt, by specialised laboratories in Germany, France, and Sweden, as well as by the OPCW.

Impunity for the use of chemical weapons must not and will not be tolerated. Those responsible for the assassination attempt on Mr Navalny must be brought to justice. On 15 October 2020, the European Union imposed restrictive measures under its chemical weapons sanctions regime against six Russian individuals and one entity responsible for inducing and providing support for the poisoning of Mr Alexei Navalny with a novichok nerve agent. Furthermore, the European Union calls on the Russian Federation to fully cooperate with the OPCW to ensure an impartial international investigation, and is in this regard concerned that Russia appears to no longer consider a Technical Assistance Visit to Russia relevant, despite the readiness of the OPCW Secretariat to deploy its experts in order to help clarify the case.

The European Union once again urges the Russian Federation, in full transparency and without further delay, to disclose and credibly explain the circumstances of the assassination attempt.

The Convention is a key instrument of the global non-proliferation architecture. It requires a predictable and solid financial base to achieve a world free of chemical weapons. The Director-General's proposed programme and budget for 2022 – 2023 enables the OPCW to continue its vital work, including cooperation and assistance projects. In this context, the European Union calls upon all States Parties to pay their assessed contributions in full and on time.

A successful transformation of the OPCW laboratory into a Centre for Chemistry and Technology (the ChemTech Centre) will be key to enhancing the Organisation's capacity to perform its core tasks in verification, inspection, and capacity building. An important number of States Parties have committed voluntary funding to the establishment of the ChemTech Centre. The European Union has made a substantial voluntary contribution to this project in the amount of EUR 16.1 million, including voluntary contributions made by European Union Member States in their national capacity. We would like to commend the Director-General's efforts in keeping the ChemTech Centre project on track in spite of exceptional circumstances. We call on all States Parties to support and contribute to this project, which will benefit all States Parties.

The European Union applauds the considerable efforts undertaken by the Secretariat to ensure the business continuity of the OPCW during the Covid-19 pandemic. In the past year, it became very clear that in some specific circumstances, in-person meetings might not be possible, and using virtual meeting technology might then become the only way for the OPCW's policy-making organs to fulfil their duties. The European Union therefore fully supports the German initiative on Executive Council business continuity and congratulates the States Parties on their constructive engagement in this matter. The draft decision, tabled by a cross-regional group of States Parties including Germany, reflects a well-balanced compromise that will enhance the business continuity of the Executive Council in the future. The wording takes into account all concerns expressed by the States Parties during the consultation process. The European Union and its Member States encourage all OPCW States Parties to support the adoption of this adequate decision.

The European Union welcomes the efforts to amend the OPCW Tenure Policy with a view to improving the Secretariat's ability to maintain key expertise as required to ensure the continued implementation of the Convention.

The European Union reiterates its full support for the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, and underlines the complementary nature of its work with that of the United Nations. In this context, the European Union appreciates the regular sharing of information of the OPCW activities and investigations with the United Nations Secretary-General and the United Nations Security Council.

Finally, I would like to reiterate the importance of engaging all relevant stakeholders, ranging from chemical industry to think tanks, civil society organisations, and non-governmental organisations, in the OPCW's work, including during these exceptional circumstances. In this spirit, the European Union encourages finding the ways and means to ensure their meaningful, broadest possible participation in the Twenty-Sixth Conference of the States Parties.

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

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