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**STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE EUROPEAN UNION
DELIVERED BY H.E. AMBASSADOR MARJOLIJN VAN DEELEN
SPECIAL ENVOY FOR DISARMAMENT AND NON-PROLIFERATION
AT THE TWENTY-SIXTH SESSION
OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES**

Mr. Chairperson,

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

The candidate countries Albania, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia, and Turkey, and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries Iceland and Norway, members of the European Economic Area (EEA), as well as 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 pay tribute to H.E. Ambassador José Antonio Zabalgaitia Trejo of Mexico, Chairperson of the Twenty-Fifth Session of the Conference of the States Parties, and H.E. Ambassador Abdelouahab Bellouki of Morocco, Chairperson of the Executive Council, for their tireless efforts and outstanding performance in fulfilling their respective duties. We also warmly congratulate H.E. Ambassador Bård Ivar Svendsen of Norway for his election as the Chairperson of the Twenty-Sixth Session of the Conference of the States Parties. We are confident that his diplomatic skills and professional experience will pave the way for a successful conclusion of this session of the conference.

We take this opportunity to thank the OPCW Director-General Ambassador Fernando Arias and his staff for their efforts in ensuring the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (“the Convention”) and performing tasks assigned by the States Parties despite of the ongoing challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Director-General’s successful tenure since 2018 has been characterised by his exceptional leadership, hard work and commitment to work with all the States Parties to serve the interests of the Convention. We commend his efforts from the beginning of his tenure aiming at ensuring a more gender balanced, diverse and representative Technical Secretariat as well as to strengthening training and knowledge management to mitigate effects of rotation. We also commend the Director-General for his efforts to enhance gender mainstreaming and welcome the gender-audit carried out in the Spring of 2021, and we look forward to receiving a presentation on its results.

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



The European Union reiterates its full confidence in the OPCW Technical Secretariat, its professionalism, impartiality, and well-established technical expertise. We remain steadfast in defending the Organisation against deliberate and baseless attacks on its integrity and credibility. The European Union recalls that on 27 October 2021 the United Nations General Assembly First Committee reaffirmed its strong support for the Convention and the OPCW in the resolution on the implementation of the Convention (A/C.1/76/L.10) prepared annually by Poland. In this context, we underline the complementarity of the work between the OPCW and the United Nations and appreciate the regular sharing of information of the OPCW activities and investigations with the United Nations Secretary-General and the United Nations Security Council.

The use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere, at any time and under any circumstances 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 Session of the Conference of the States Parties on 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 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 the decision and considers it an appropriate response by the Conference of the States Parties 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 the United Nations Security Council resolution 2118 (2013) and is a consequence of the continued failure of the Syrian Arab Republic to fully declare and destroy its chemical weapons programme. In order to reverse the decision, the Syrian Arab Republic needs to resolve the pending issues, declare the full extent of its chemical weapons programme, and return to full compliance with the Convention.

The Syrian regime's failure to respect its international obligations under the Convention is substantiated through comprehensive and thorough investigations carried out by the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) as well as the OPCW Declaration Assessment Team (DAT), Fact-Finding Mission (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 commends the work of the Technical Secretariat on all aspects of the Syrian chemical weapons programme, including the confidential briefings to States Parties on their on-going work and working methods. We also commend the Director-General's continuous efforts to engage with the Syrian Arab Republic and encourage the Syrian Arab Republic to constructively engage and 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. Denying OPCW staff to access Syria obstructs the work of the Technical Secretariat and its ability to implement its mandate and to deploy on the ground. This contravenes States Parties' obligations under paragraph 7 of Article VII of the Convention. We call on the Syrian Arab Republic to grant visas for all OPCW personnel in a timely manner, as required by the Convention and United Nations Security Council resolution 2118.

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 of all findings. We have already imposed restrictive measures on 32 senior Syrian officials and scientists and two entities for their role in the development and use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic. We are ready to consider introducing further measures as appropriate, and we 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 perpetrators, including 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 agenda and is essential for upholding international norms related to chemical weapons use. The European Union once again underlines its strong concerns that the Russian Federation has not reacted to international calls, including those reiterated on the occasion of the last session of the Executive Council, 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.

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 the Russian Federation relevant, despite the readiness of the OPCW Technical 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.

Impunity for the use of chemical weapons must not and will not be tolerated. Those responsible for the assassination attempts 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 to the poisoning of Mr Alexei Navalny with the novichok toxic nerve agent. Previously, the European Union has introduced sanctions on four senior officials from the Russian military intelligence service involved in the poisonings with novichok in Salisbury in 2018.

The Convention is a key instrument of the global non-proliferation architecture. It requires a predictable and solid financial base to reach a world free of chemical weapons. The Director-General's proposed biennial Draft 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 (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 amounting to 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 despite the exceptional circumstances. We call on all States Parties to support and contribute to this project which will benefit all States Parties.

At its Ninety-Sixth Session, the Executive Council decided to recommend to the Conference of the States Parties the adoption of a decision regarding "Understanding Regarding the Aerosolised Use of Central Nervous System-Acting Chemicals for Law Enforcement Purposes" (EC-97/Dec.7, dated 11 March 2021). The European Union Member States note that the aerosolised use of central nervous system-acting chemicals (CNS-acting chemicals) is understood to be inconsistent with law enforcement purposes as "a purpose not prohibited" under the Convention and further note that the decision does not address the use of CNS-acting chemicals for other purposes not prohibited under the Convention.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of the Convention needs to be thoroughly analysed. This should be informed by lessons learnt and best practices identified, including those of other relevant international organisations, also with a view to providing general guidance for other unforeseen circumstances. The European Union commends Germany for having initiated an inclusive reflection exercise and proposed a draft decision for further consideration by the Executive Council. The aim is to allow the Executive Council—in case extraordinary circumstances occur—to convene sessions or meetings, at another venue in The Hague or remotely, by using virtual meeting technology.

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 work, including during these exceptional circumstances. In this spirit, the European Union encourages efforts to find ways and means for ensuring their meaningful and broadest possible participation in the Conference of the States Parties.

Mr Chairperson, I would kindly ask this statement to be considered an official document of the Twenty-Sixth Session of the Conference of the States Parties and posted on the OPCW external server and public website.