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Conference of the States Parties

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IRELAND

**STATEMENT BY MR FRANK GROOME
DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF IRELAND TO THE OPCW
AT THE TWENTY-SIXTH SESSION
OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES**

Mr Chairperson,
Director-General,
Distinguished delegates,

Ireland fully aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union. I will make the following statement in a national capacity.

Ireland joins others in warmly congratulating you on your appointment as Chairperson of the Twenty-Sixth Session of the Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention (“the Convention”). I can assure you of my delegation’s full support and cooperation in the work ahead. I would also like to express Ireland’s appreciation to the outgoing Chairperson, Ambassador José Antonio Zabalgotia Trejo of Mexico, and to the Chairperson of the Executive Council, Ambassador Bellouki of Morocco.

In the face of ongoing challenges and threats, the Organisation needs now, more than ever, strong, effective and experienced leadership. Therefore, Ireland fully supports the re-election of Director-General Fernando Arias for a second term. We believe the Director-General is the right person to guide us through these next years of work, including the important Fifth Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties to Review the Operation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (the Fifth Review Conference) in 2023. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Director-General and his staff for their continuous determination to ensure the effective implementation of the Convention.

The Director-General has demonstrated exceptional leadership, navigating the Organisation through the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and successfully managing the complex array of challenges facing the OPCW in recent years. Ireland also lends our full support to the Director-General’s commitment to gender balance and the objective of a more diverse and inclusive Technical Secretariat.

The marked increase in the use of chemical weapons in recent years is completely contrary to the aims of this Organisation. Ireland remains resolute in our rejection and condemnation of any use of chemical weapons anywhere, by anyone, under any circumstances. We fully support the conclusions of the second report of the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) published in April 2021, and we strongly condemn the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian



Arab Air Force. We commend the work of the IIT, and we await the release of the next reports. As a State Party to the Convention and a member of the United Nations Security Council, Ireland places the quest for accountability at the centre of all our work, maintaining a clear focus in the fight against impunity.

Complete and accurate declarations go to the heart of any verification effort. After some eight years of work, the Technical Secretariat is clear that the 2013 declaration of the Syrian Arab Republic still cannot be considered accurate or complete. This is due to the gaps, inconsistencies, and discrepancies in Syria's accounts that remain unresolved. Last April, States Parties took an important decision to suspend the voting rights and privileges of the Syrian Arab Republic in response to the repeated failures to comply with the Convention.

Ireland supports this decision and the strong message it sends in the fight against impunity. However, we are disappointed that Syria's cooperation with the Technical Secretariat has only continued to deteriorate. We remain dismayed by the clear pattern of visa delays and denials holding up the OPCW's work on the ground. This includes delays for the command post officer in Damascus, with implications for the Declaration Assessment Team and Fact-Finding Mission deployments, and the further postponement of the Declaration Assessment Team's deployment due to Syria's continued refusal to provide visas to all members of the team. This is contrary to Syria's obligations under the Convention and under United Nations Security Council resolution 2118 to accept "personnel designated by the OPCW or the United Nations" and to provide "immediate and unfettered access".

Syria must urgently take action to address these matters and engage seriously with the OPCW. The Technical Secretariat has demonstrated ongoing flexibility and patience in seeking to resolve outstanding issues and it is now up to the Syrian Arab Republic to meaningfully cooperate with the Organisation. We note the willingness of the Director-General to hold a bilateral meeting with Foreign Minister Mekdad and we hope that the arrangements for this meeting can be finalised soon. Any meeting held must lead to substantive progress on this file and we encourage the Syrian Arab Republic to break the impasse.

Ireland is pleased to support the joint statement drafted by France and welcomes the continued efforts to keep this matter to the fore of our work. We also commend France for the political leadership in furthering the work of the International Partnership Against the Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons.

Ireland unequivocally condemns the attempted assassination of Mr Alexei Navalny with a novichok nerve agent and fully aligns with the joint statement on this case delivered at this session of the conference. The confirmed use of a novichok agent has raised serious questions that have not yet been answered. The use of a chemical weapon against Mr Navalny is an affront to the global rules and norms that we have collectively committed to uphold. The failure of the Russian Federation to heed international requests to thoroughly and transparently investigate the poisoning of Mr Alexei Navalny is regrettable. We urge the Russian Federation to provide substantive answers to address the doubts and concerns raised in the questions posed under Article IX paragraph 2 by States Parties and reiterate our call for the Russian Federation to cooperate fully with the OPCW.

Ireland emphasises the importance of a unified response in the face of threats to the Convention, wherever they may come from. In this regard, we support the European Union's restrictive measures against a number of Russian individuals for inducing and providing support in the poisoning of Mr Navalny.

In addition to the expertise of the Technical Secretariat upon which all States Parties rely, our work is enriched by input from experts from civil society, including academia. We are deeply concerned by any attempts to limit or hinder the contribution that has been, and must continue to be, made by experts from outside the Organisation.

Ireland is disappointed that the transparent and fair participation of civil society in the work of the Conference is being undermined by a small minority of States Parties. Ireland will continue our efforts to champion the invaluable role that civil society plays; and we are pleased to endorse the joint statement drafted by Canada on this important issue.

Ireland will co-sponsor and vote in favour of the decision on aerosolised use of central nervous system-acting chemicals placed before this session of the conference and we encourage all members to support this decision. We take the opportunity to thank Australia, Switzerland and the United States of America for their ongoing commitment to this initiative. The continued efforts of the core co-sponsors to secure wide cross-regional support for this initiative is particularly welcome.

Ireland urges all States Parties to vote in favour of the biennial Draft Programme and Budget for 2022–2023. This decision will enable the Organisation to continue its vital work and will provide the Organisation with a clearer sense of priorities for the years ahead. The OPCW requires a predictable and solid financial foundation to facilitate the effective implementation of the Convention and to reach a world free of chemical weapons. Ireland joins others in calling upon all States Parties to pay their assessed contributions in full and on time.

Mr Chairperson, in closing, Ireland is pleased to be joining the OPCW Executive Council in May 2022. In this role, we will endeavour to embody the principles of the Convention and will continue our efforts in pursuing accountability, upholding the integrity of the Convention, and supporting the work of the Director-General and Technical Secretariat. The use of chemical weapons is an affront to humanity, and we call upon all States Parties to unite and intensify efforts to uphold the global norm against chemical weapons.

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

Thank you.

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