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COLOMBIA

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR FERNANDO ANTONIO GRILLO RUBIANO
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF COLOMBIA
TO THE OPCW AT THE TWENTY-SIXTH SESSION
OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES**

Mr Chairperson,
Mr Director-General,
Distinguished delegates,

I begin my statement by welcoming Ambassador Bård Ivar Svendsen, Chairperson of this session of the Conference of the States Parties, and expressing to him my sincere wishes for his success in this post. I recognise Ambassador José Antonio Zabalgaitia Trejo for the work that he has carried out. Likewise, I extend a warm welcome to the other members of the Bureau.

I offer special recognition of Ambassador Fernando Arias, Director-General of the Organisation, for his leadership at the head of the Technical Secretariat, as well as his strong commitment to the effective implementation of the provisions of the Convention. I share this welcome with each of the individuals who work within the Technical Secretariat.

Proceeding from the mandate enshrined in its Political Constitution, Colombia reaffirms its commitment to the universal destruction of chemical weapons, it condemns their use in any situation, under any circumstances, by anyone, and underscores the need for those responsible for the use of chemical weapons to be fully identified and for all States Parties, in line with their respective legal frameworks and obligations under the Convention, to work constructively with the Technical Secretariat of the OPCW.

The constitutional mandate that addresses the importance that the Convention and its provisions have for my country is also supported by the national Government at its highest level. This was expressed by the Vice-President of the Republic and Minister of Colombia during her visit to the OPCW this past September 2021.

My country advocates for the universality of the Convention, a critical tool of disarmament and non-proliferation and, in general, for the maintenance of global peace and security. We call upon those States that are not yet Party to the Convention to join it.

For Colombia, the nearly full universality that the Convention currently has absolutely must be translated into zero occurrences of any incidents with chemical weapons in the world.

In this regard, Colombia observes with concern the findings of the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) which, in its two reports released in April 2020 and April 2021,



respectively (S/1867/2020 and S/1943/2021) confirm that there are reasonable grounds to believe that the Syrian Air Force used chemical weapons in four attacks that took place in Ltamenah on 24, 25, and 30 March 2017, and in Saraqib on 4 February 2018.

Colombia calls upon the Syrian Arab Republic to strengthen its cooperation with the Technical Secretariat in order to clarify the various incidents and attacks that have taken place on its territory, as well as the issues related to the discrepancies identified in its initial declaration. The former must be done in accordance with the decision “Addressing the Possession and Use of Chemical Weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic” adopted at the Twenty-Fifth Session of the Conference of the States Parties.

I take this opportunity to reiterate our support and vote of confidence in the professionalism and impartiality with which the OPCW missions working on the dossier of the Syrian Arab Republic carry out their work; these include the Investigation and Identification Team, the Fact-Finding Mission, and the Declaration Assessment Team.

In terms of exercising the facilitation of Article VII, Colombia expresses its thanks to the Technical Secretariat for the precise and prompt work providing support to Member States in their respective processes to adopt measures ensuring the national implementation of the Convention. Likewise, we invite States Parties to continue to make advances in their national processes, and we express our full willingness to, from our own institutional framework, provide any support that may be needed.

With regard to Article X, my country highlights its role in the process of building the national capacities of countries in the Latin America and Caribbean region in terms of responding to chemical incidents and emergencies through a variety of regional courses and exercises that have benefitted approximately 17 countries over the course of six years, and which were developed with the support of the Technical Secretariat. On this same matter, Colombia wishes to underscore the capabilities of the OPCW’s team tasked with adapting to the conditions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Likewise, we express our interest in continuing this collaborative work with the Organisation and call for the resumption of in-person activities as soon as health conditions permit.

Colombia reiterates its support for the provisions set out in Article XI of the Convention related to cooperation and economic and technological development. The peaceful use of chemistry is a topic of special interest for developing countries as it has scientific capacity-building implications for their national economies. In this regard, Colombia welcomes the work carried out by the Technical Secretariat and calls for it to be continued and bolstered.

With regard to current discussions on issues related to the staff tenure policy and balanced geographical representation within the Technical Secretariat, Colombia would like to underscore that the Latin America and Caribbean region boasts professionals of the highest level and, as such, emphasises the need to put into place mechanisms and bridges that will help candidates from the region network effectively.

Colombia applauds the important progress made in the construction of the Centre for Chemistry and Technology, which is expected to become a leader in the field of investigation and capacity building in science and technology. In particular, Colombia expresses its willingness to contribute to the configuration, consolidation, and operation of the Centre via its national capacities, led by our Ministry of Science and Technology.

In conclusion, Colombia wishes to emphasise the importance that the year 2022 will have in preparation for the Fifth Review Conference, scheduled in the first half of 2023. The Conference will serve not only as a space for reflection upon what has taken place in recent years, but it will also be an opportunity to chart out strategic guidelines that will allow the Organisation to remain ahead of new challenges and realities. Colombia expresses its special interest in participating in this process, and makes a special call to the States Parties to come together to search for common ground that will allow us to continue moving forward in achieving the object and purpose of the Convention.

I kindly request that this statement be considered an official document of the Twenty-Sixth Session of the Conference of the States Parties and published on the Organisation's external server and website.

Thank you.

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