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Addressing the threat from Chemical Weapons Use

Thank you Madame Chair,

Last year, the UK published our Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Foreign and Development Policy. It was clear-sighted about the deteriorating security environment and growing pressures on the global counter-proliferation architecture. We undertook to do more to expose non-compliance with governing treaties.

The backdrop to our meeting this week is Russia's unprovoked and horrific invasion of Ukraine, a sovereign and democratic state. In the run-up to Russia's long-planned assault on Ukraine we saw a number of false claims about chemical weapons. On 21 December 2021, Russian Defence Minister Shoigu said 'For the purposes of carrying out acts of provocation, reserves of an unidentified chemical component have been delivered' to eastern Ukraine. On 3 March Foreign Minister Lavrov accused the United States of having chemical and biological laboratories in Ukraine. Russia should know that the world's eyes are on them and that we see through their manipulations and cynical attempts to justify their military aggression. Russia bears full responsibility.

Sadly this is an all too familiar pattern of appalling behaviour from the Russian playbook. We saw it in 2018 after the heinous chemical weapons attack on my own country, an attack perpetrated by Russian military agents. We have seen nothing but obfuscation and falsehoods from Russia in relation to the Novichok attack on Alexei Navalny in 2020. We witness a constant stream of attacks on the OPCW in a vain attempt to distract from Russia's own culpability.

Madame Chair,

We should not lost sight of the fact that Russia has still not answered the Article IX questions that the UK and 44 other States Parties posed last year about the poisoning of Alexey Navalny; a poisoning which clearly took place on Russian territory. Instead Russia has dodged the questions and focused on what it knows best: disinformation. We will keep pressing Russia to account for this use of a banned chemical weapon.

Madame Chair,

We must all be on our guard for further efforts to undermine the OPCW and the global norm against chemical weapons use. Be in no doubt that

the threat is real and that a tiny minority of states are prepared to flout the commitments we all made to consign chemical weapons to history.

However, by standing together in defence of the Chemical Weapons Convention and the OPCW, as we have done before, we have it in our power to change their calculations. We can address the threat of chemical weapons use and ensure those who violate international norms have nowhere to hide.

Thank you Madame Chair.