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**STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE EUROPEAN UNION  
DELIVERED BY H.E. AMBASSADOR KATEŘINA SEQUENSOVÁ  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC TO THE OPCW  
AT THE 101ST SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

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

The Candidate Countries Albania, North Macedonia, Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine, the potential candidate countries Bosnia and Herzegovina and Georgia, and the EFTA (European Free Trade Association) countries Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway, members of the EEA (European Economic Area) align themselves with this statement.

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

The European Union would like to thank the Chairperson, H.E. Ambassador Ziad M. D. Al Atiyah of Saudi Arabia, for guiding the preparatory work for this 101st Session of the Executive Council (“the Council”) in an effective manner. I would like to assure him of our full support in steering the work of the Council also in the months to come.

We also take this opportunity to commend the leadership of OPCW Director-General, Ambassador Fernando Arias, and reiterate our full confidence in the OPCW Technical Secretariat (“the Secretariat”), its professionalism, impartiality, and well-established technical expertise in implementing the Chemical Weapons Convention (“the Convention”) and tasks assigned by the States Parties.

The year of 2022 has completely changed the paradigm of global, as well as European, security architecture. Russia’s unjustifiable, unprovoked, and illegal war of aggression against Ukraine is an attack on our common principles. It grossly violates the United Nations Charter, undermining the international rules-based international order and multilateralism, damaging the global economy and aggravating global food and energy security, which, across the globe, hit the most vulnerable. In the face of this affront to humanity, the European Union and its Member States recall the binding character of the United Nations Charter in its entirety, and stress the universality of the United Nations’ founding principles, as enshrined in the Charter.

The European Union resolutely condemns the Russian aggression and demands that Russia immediately, completely, and unconditionally withdraws all its troops and military equipment from the entire territory of Ukraine and fully respects Ukraine’s territorial integrity, sovereignty, and independence within its internationally recognised borders. The European Union is unwavering in its support to Ukraine and its people in its inherent right to self-defence against the Russian aggression and to build a peaceful, democratic, and prosperous future. Russia bears full responsibility for this act of aggression and all the destruction and loss of life it will cause. It will be held accountable for its actions.



Moreover, as part of its aggression against Ukraine, Russia has engaged in a campaign of disinformation and state-controlled propaganda in spreading unsubstantiated and unfounded allegations against Ukraine and others regarding chemical weapons while risking exposure of the Ukrainian population to toxic chemicals through their deliberate attacks against civilian industrial facilities. Let us recall that Russia, the country responsible for the ongoing war and violations of international law and international humanitarian law in Ukraine, has a track record in the use of chemical weapons in assassinations and assassination attempts as well as in sowing disinformation.

It is well established that Ukraine is a responsible member of the Convention and in full compliance with the Convention. In this context, we also remain steadfast in defending the OPCW Secretariat against baseless accusations and attacks on its integrity and credibility through deliberate campaigns of state-sponsored disinformation. Following the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, the European Union has adopted massive and unprecedented sanctions packages against Russia. On 3 June 2022, the list of sanctions was amended to ban the export of chemicals to Russia that could be misused for the manufacturing of chemical weapons.

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 by the international community against impunity for the use of chemical weapons, and in defence of international law, including international humanitarian law, and the integrity of the Convention. It is an appropriate response by the Conference to the clear violation by the Syrian Arab Republic of the Convention and its core principles. In order for its voting rights and other privileges to be restored, Syria needs to resolve all 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 UN-OPCW 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 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, including at ministerial level. Refusal to issue visas for OPCW staff and preventing their deployment on the ground seriously hampers the work of the Secretariat and its ability to fulfil its mandate. We urge Syria to issue visas without delay for all requesting staff members of the OPCW, including all the members of the DAT, in accordance with the obligations of States Parties under paragraph 7 of Article VII of the Convention and United Nations Security Council resolution 2118. Unfortunately, there is no progress reported to the Council in any of the open issues. We encourage Syria to act constructively, 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 reports, and is determined to ensure appropriate follow-up to its findings. We have already imposed restrictive measures on 32 senior Syrian officials, military personnel, and scientists as well as two entities for their role in the development and use of chemical weapons.

We are ready to consider introducing further measures as appropriate, and, as a member of the International Partnership Against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons, we will continue to work towards ensuring full accountability for those responsible for these egregious crimes.

Addressing the threat of chemical weapons use lies at the core of the Convention and is essential for upholding international legal norms. The European Union reiterates its strong concerns that the Russian Federation has not reacted to international calls, including those made on the occasion of the 100th Session of the Council and during the Twenty-Sixth Session of the Conference in December 2021, for a thorough and transparent investigation into the assassination attempt on the Russian opposition politician Mr Alexei Navalny. The poisoning of Mr Navalny in Russia in August 2020 by a military grade nerve agent of the novichok group (a substance developed by Russia) has been confirmed, beyond doubt, by specialised laboratories in Germany, France, and Sweden, as well as by the OPCW. The European Union has condemned this poisoning in the strongest possible terms and sanctioned six Russian government officials and a state research institute linked to the assassination attempt.

The European Union once again urges the Russian Federation to provide substantial answers to the questions posed by 45 States Parties in the framework of paragraph 2 of Article IX of the Convention on 5 October 2021, and to disclose without further delay the circumstances of the assassination attempt against Mr Navalny.

The Fifth Review Conference will be an opportunity to consider how to strengthen implementation of the Convention as a key instrument of the international non-proliferation and disarmament regime. Achieving a common vision on countering the re-emergence of chemical weapons and safeguarding the global non-use norm is a shared responsibility of all States Parties. The European Union and its Member States will contribute actively and constructively to the work of the Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG). The agreed work programme allows all delegations to effectively express their expectations and priorities regarding the variety of topics at stake for the future of our Organisation. We encourage all States Parties to engage in the preparation process. In this context, I would like to express our gratitude to the Chairperson, Ambassador Lauri Kuusing of Estonia, for leading the work in an open and inclusive manner, with the goal of building consensus.

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 revision of the Programme and Budget for 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. At the same time, under the currently more challenging financial conditions, the Secretariat is required to practice strict budgetary discipline so that the Organisation can continue to fulfil all its objectives.

The European Union has noted with great concern the information provided by Director-General Arias that the Secretariat will face a high turnover in the Inspectorate Division in 2023, which will affect its operational capacity. The situation underlines the urgent need for amending the OPCW tenure policy in the context of the Fifth Review Conference with a view to improving the Secretariat's ability to maintain key expertise to ensure the continued implementation of the Convention. As an interim measure, a new decision on rehiring of inspectors is warranted.

The European Union commends the Director-General for working towards a more gender-balanced, diverse, and representative Secretariat. We look forward to further progress towards gender equality in the Organisation, including through the enhancement of gender mainstreaming in all areas of the Secretariat's work. We underline the importance of the swift implementation of the recommendations of the gender and diversity audit, and encourage the timely sharing of results with States Parties on this implementation.

The German initiative on Council business continuity aims at providing guidance for emergency circumstances, under which OPCW premises cannot be used and Council meetings or sessions could only take place at alternative venues or through virtual meeting technology. The European Union congratulates the States Parties on their constructive engagement in this matter and strongly encourages all members of the OPCW Council to join the broad consensus and to support the adoption of this decision.

Finally, I would like to reiterate the importance of engaging all relevant stakeholders, ranging from the chemical industry to think tanks, civil society organisations, and non-governmental organisations, in the OPCW's work. In this spirit, the European Union encourages the effort to find ways and means for ensuring their meaningful and broadest possible participation in the Conference, including the Fifth Review Conference.

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

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