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FINLAND

STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR ILKKA-PEKKA SIMILÄ PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF FINLAND TO THE OPCW AT THE 101ST SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Mr Chairperson, Director-General, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Finland wishes to thank H.E. Ambassador Ziad M.D. Al Atiyah of Saudi Arabia for his efforts as the Chairperson of the Executive Council. I would also like to express Finland's unwavering support to the OPCW Technical Secretariat ("the Secretariat"). We thank the Director-General, Ambassador Fernando Arias, and his staff for their dedication and determined efforts. We reiterate our full confidence in the expertise, professionalism, impartiality, and independence of the Secretariat in the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention ("the Convention") and other tasks assigned to it by the States Parties. Finland remains a steadfast supporter of the Convention and the work of the OPCW to keep the world free of chemical weapons.

Finland aligns itself with the statement made by the Czech Republic on behalf of the European Union. In addition, I wish to highlight a few issues from a national perspective.

Finland strongly condemns Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine. It is a flagrant violation of international law. We firmly support Ukraine's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. Russia's military actions target Ukraine but are also an attack on the entire European security order. Russia should cease military operations immediately. We denounce Russia's engagement in disinformation campaigns spreading unsubstantiated allegations against Ukraine and others regarding chemical weapons.

We furthermore reiterate in the strongest possible terms our condemnation of the sham "referenda" organised by the Russian Federation in regions of Ukraine currently and partially occupied by Russia. These are in blatant violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and the United Nations Charter. Finland does not and will never recognise these illegal "referenda" and their falsified outcome, nor any decision taken on the basis of this outcome.

Finland condemns in the strongest possible terms the use of chemical weapons in all circumstances, by anyone, anywhere, and at any time. The use of chemical weapons undermines international peace and security and constitutes a violation of international law, in certain circumstances amounting to war crimes and crimes against humanity. Addressing the threat from chemical weapons use is essential for upholding international norms. We do not tolerate impunity for the use of chemical weapons, and we continue to support collective efforts to ensure accountability for perpetrators of chemical attacks, including through the International Partnership Against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons.



The Twenty-Fifth Session of the Conference of the States Parties to the Convention took a decision to suspend certain rights and privileges of the Syrian Arab Republic due to Syria's failure to comply with the Convention. The decision was the appropriate response to the well-established and substantiated failure of the Syrian Arab Republic to respect its obligations under the Convention. It sends a strong message against impunity for the use of chemical weapons. The decision is not irreversible. The Syrian Arab Republic needs to resolve pending issues and return to full compliance with the Convention for its reversal.

We thank the Secretariat for their work on all aspects of the Syrian chemical weapons programme and look forward to further efforts, including the next reports of the Investigation and Identification Team. In support of the Secretariat's work in Syria, Finland will contribute EUR 100,000 to the OPCW trust fund for Syria missions this year.

Regrettably, the use of chemical weapons remains high on our agenda. We reiterate, once more, our unequivocal condemnation of the use of a chemical nerve agent of the novichok group to poison Alexei Navalny on the territory of the Russian Federation in August 2020. We remain deeply concerned that numerous international calls for a thorough and transparent investigation into the assassination attempt have not been answered. We yet again urge the Russian Federation to disclose and credibly explain the circumstances of this chemical weapons use and to fully comply with its obligations under the Convention. Full cooperation with the OPCW is imperative.

The Convention is a key element of the global non-proliferation architecture and disarmament efforts. Every five years, the States Parties gather together to assess progress achieved, ensure the continued relevance of the Convention, and strengthen its implementation. The Fifth Review Conference, in May 2023, will be an opportunity for all States Parties to formulate a common vision to counter re-emergence of chemical weapons and reaffirm the global non-use norm of chemical weapons. We are encouraged by the preparatory process so far and hope that the active engagement of States Parties moving forward continues. In this context, I would like to express our gratitude and full support to the Chairperson of the Open-Ended Working Group, Ambassador Lauri Kuusing of Estonia, for steering the preparatory process in an open and inclusive manner.

Achieving a world permanently free of chemical weapons requires predictable and solid financial resources. Finland supports the Director-General's proposed revision of the Programme and Budget for 2023, which will enable the OPCW to continue its important work. In addition to financial resources, the OPCW needs adequate and qualified human resources and expertise. In this context, the high turnover of inspectors expected in 2023 is concerning. An interim solution can be found through the adoption of a new decision on rehiring of inspectors. As a longer-term solution, it is necessary to amend the OPCW tenure policy with the goal of providing required flexibility for the benefit of the Organisation and the uninterrupted implementation of the Convention.

To conclude I want to express our appreciation and strong support to the Director-General's efforts towards a more diverse Secretariat. We welcome and support efforts towards gender equality in the Organisation, and enhanced gender mainstreaming in all areas of the Secretariat's work, including in capacity building and assistance activities. The development of a gender and diversity strategy is a welcome step.

I kindly request that this statement be circulated as an official document of this session and posted on the external server and public website.

Thank you, Mr Chairperson.