



OPCW

Conference of the States Parties

Twenty-Seventh Session
28 November – 1 December 2022

C-27/NAT.64
28 November 2022
ENGLISH and FRENCH only

SWITZERLAND

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR HEINZ WALKER-NEDERKOORN
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SWISS CONFEDERATION TO THE
OPCW AT THE TWENTY-SEVENTH SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE
STATES PARTIES**

Mr Chairperson,

Allow me to join previous speakers in thanking you, as well as the Technical Secretariat (“the Secretariat”), for your efforts in preparing this year’s Conference of the States Parties (“the Conference”). Let me assure you of the full support and cooperation of my delegation.

Chemical weapons continue to represent a serious threat to international and human security. It is essential that the universal prohibition of these weapons be upheld and that all States that have not yet acceded to the Chemical Weapons Convention (“the Convention”) do so as soon as possible. It is also fundamental that all States Parties fully comply with the provisions of the Convention. It is of concern that 25 years after the entry into force of the Convention, only 63% of States Parties include all initial measures in national implementation, while 37% still have gaps or no implementing legislation.

Switzerland condemns in the strongest possible terms Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine and calls upon Russia to de-escalate the situation immediately, to cease all hostilities, and to withdraw its troops from Ukrainian territory without delay.

After careful consideration of the numerous documents circulated by the Russian Federation within the OPCW regarding chemical weapons in Ukraine, Switzerland is of the firm view that the allegations made have not been substantiated and that the conclusions drawn are neither convincing nor credible.

Regarding Syria, Switzerland remains very concerned by the absence of meaningful cooperation by Syrian authorities with the OPCW. The Secretariat assesses that Syria’s initial declaration still cannot be considered accurate and complete, as gaps, inconsistencies, and discrepancies identified by the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) remain unresolved and have in fact increased since 2014. The resumption of consultations on this matter is urgent.

Switzerland also recalls its serious concern about the findings in the two latest reports of the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM). In what can only be called a thorough, impartial, and professional investigation, the FFM confirmed that the evaluation and analysis of all available information provide reasonable grounds to believe that toxic chemicals were used as weapons, both in Marea on 1 September 2015 and in Kafr Zeita on 1 October 2016.



Further, the first report of the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) convincingly concluded that there are reasonable grounds to believe that the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons in the town of Ltamenah, Syria in March 2017 were individuals belonging to the Syrian Arab Air Force. In its second report, the IIT concluded that there are reasonable grounds to believe that the Syrian Arab Air Force, under the control of the Tiger Forces, used at least one chemical weapon in eastern Saraqib on 4 February 2018.

These are very grave breaches of the Convention. We call on the Syrian Arab Republic to fully cooperate with the OPCW, in particular the DAT and FFM, and to grant the IIT unfettered access to its territory as well as to all relevant information. Complying with the decisions of States Parties is not optional. Switzerland stands fully behind the IIT's mandate and has absolutely no doubt about its legality and legitimacy—nothing in the Convention precludes an attribution role for the Organisation.

Switzerland condemns in the strongest possible terms the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere, and under any circumstances. Their use constitutes a serious violation of international law, and in particular of the Convention. Those responsible must be brought to justice. The impunity of the perpetrators for these crimes is simply unacceptable.

Therefore, in regard to the poisoning of Alexei Navalny with a nerve agent of the novichok group, Switzerland once again calls on the Russian Federation to launch a transparent and impartial criminal investigation to hold those responsible to account, and to fully cooperate with the OPCW and the international community.

Switzerland thanks the OPCW for its hard work under difficult conditions and wishes to express its greatest appreciation. We reiterate our full confidence in the work and findings of the Secretariat, which has consistently carried out its missions within the context of the FFM, DAT, and IIT in a professional and impartial manner and in full respect of its mandate. In order to ensure the Organisation's effectiveness, we must continue to support it both politically and financially. My Government therefore fully endorses the Revised Programme and Budget for 2023.

The Open-Ended Working Group for the Preparation of the Fifth Review Conference was established more than a year ago and Switzerland wishes to thank its Chairperson, Ambassador Lauri Kuusing of Estonia, and the Secretariat for their tireless efforts in ensuring a substantial and thorough preparatory process. My country is still fully committed to this process and will continue to actively engage in it. On this occasion, Switzerland wishes to highlight its working paper introduced last September entitled "A strengthened CWC". Switzerland is of the opinion that a robust verification regime serves as a strong deterrent against the use of chemical weapons. Therefore, several elements upon which the Fifth Review Conference should reflect and act have been proposed. Furthermore, in the framework of international cooperation under Article X, Switzerland supports the capacity building of States Parties to build their own capabilities for the protection against chemical weapons. The ability of the Secretariat to contribute to these efforts should be encouraged as well.

We note the valuable contribution of the Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) and its recommendations, which are essential to ensuring that the OPCW remains fully capable of countering new chemical weapon threats in the future. At the Twenty-Sixth Session of the Conference, we adopted an important decision on central nervous system-acting chemicals for

law enforcement purposes, based also on a recommendation from the SAB. We encourage the policy-making organs to consider the recommendations of the SAB more swiftly in the future.

To maintain the integrity of the Convention, it is important that all of its provisions be upheld, whether they relate to chemical warfare agents, the use of riot control agents as a method of warfare, central nervous system-acting chemicals for law enforcement purposes, or rapidly developing scientific and technological developments.

Before I conclude, Mr Chairperson, my delegation wishes to put on record our concern about the accreditation process for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to attend this Conference. The refusal by a small number of States Parties to accredit NGOs, whose activities are demonstrably relevant to the object and purpose of the Convention, is unacceptable. NGOs play an essential role in addressing current and future challenges and in achieving our common goal of a world free of chemical weapons.

Thank you, Mr Chairperson.

--- 0 ---