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STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE AFRICAN GROUP OF STATES PARTIES TO THE CHEMICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION DELIVERED BY H.E. AMBASSADOR FRANCIS DANTI KOTIA PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF GHANA TO THE OPCW AT THE TWENTY-SEVENTH SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES

Mr Chairperson,
Director-General,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,

On behalf of the African States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention (“the Convention”), I would like to welcome H.E. Ambassador Vusimuzi Philemon Madonsela, Permanent Representative of the Republic of South Africa to the OPCW, as Chairperson of the Twenty-Seventh Session of the Conference of the States Parties to the Convention. We are confident that, given your vast experience and expertise in the field, you will be able to steer the deliberations of this session to a successful conclusion.

Allow me to express the Group’s appreciation to the Chairperson of the Twenty Sixth-Session of the Conference of States Parties, H.E. Ambassador Bård Ivar Svendsen, Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Norway, for all his dedicated efforts during that session and in the preparation for this session. The Group wishes him all the best in his future endeavours.

The Africa Group associates itself with the statement on behalf of the Member States of the Non-Aligned Movement that are States Parties to the Convention and China delivered to the Twenty-Seventh Session of the Conference of the States Parties by the H.E. Ambassador Gaya Mammadov, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the OPCW.

We would like also, to extend our appreciation to OPCW Director-General Fernando Arias, for his comprehensive statement and reiterate our confidence in his efforts to further strengthen the work of the Organisation. The Group also appreciates the staff of the Technical Secretariat for their valuable role in facilitating the implementation of the Convention and in preparation of this session.

Since the last session of the Conference of the States parties, we note the alleviation of restrictions related to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The Group appreciates the measures put in place by the OPCW and all States Parties, which have allowed continuity of the work of the Organisation. The Group welcomes the return to normality in the Netherlands and looks forward to the full resumption of the Organisation’s in-person meetings and regular



international cooperation and assistance activities, including upgrading critical infrastructure and research in chemistry for peaceful purposes and other capacity building activities to enhance cooperation with Africa.

The Africa Group expresses the view that only a global access to vaccines would contribute to the defeat of the pandemic. In this regard, the Group appreciates the support of the international community towards the COVAX programme, aimed at guaranteeing fair and equitable access to vaccines for all countries. We call on the States Parties and the international community as a whole to further support this initiative.

Mr Chairperson, as a matter of principle, the Group reiterates its position on issues that are pertinent to the object and purpose of the Convention, mainly universality of the Convention, international cooperation and assistance, as well as capacity building, the financial sustenance of the Africa Programme, Laboratory Twinning Assistance Programme, elimination of the threat of chemical terrorism, the promotion of peaceful use of chemistry for development and ensuring the diversity of the Organisation's workforce.

In respect to the universalisation of the Treaty and also towards a world free of weapons of mass destruction, the Africa Group urges the States not Party to the Convention to join without delay or preconditions. We believe that the universality of the Convention is essential in achieving its object and purpose, as well as the attainment of international peace and security. In this regard, the Group welcomes the decision of this session of the Conference to extend observer status to the Republic of South Sudan. We believe the participation of South Sudan, albeit in observer capacity, is a positive step towards universality and encourage their early accession to the Convention.

We are convinced that the measures put in place for the full, effective and non-discriminatory implementation of Article XI are of paramount importance for the reinforcement of capacity building of all States Parties. As recommended by the decision C-16/DEC.10 (dated 1 December 2011), we welcome the efforts made by the Technical Secretariat to enhance the implementation of Article XI and the outputs of the drafting committee, which streamlined the list of ideas and proposals in light of recommendations and suggestions that emerged from the review and evaluation workshops on the component of an agreed framework for the full implementation of Article XI.

We believe that the concretisation of such proposals will reinforce the implementation of this crucial pillar of the Convention in the following main domains: (i) integrated chemical management, including chemical safety, security and sustainability; (ii) enhancing laboratory capabilities; and (iii) promotion of chemical knowledge.

The Group calls on States Parties to fulfil their commitment to transfer technology, material, and equipment for peaceful purposes in the field of chemistry and to remove any discriminatory restrictions, such as unilateral sanctions against other States Parties. The Africa Group wishes in this regard to reiterate that the international cooperation programmes of the OPCW should foster economic and technological development through international cooperation in the field of chemical activities for purposes not prohibited under the Convention, in accordance with the provisions of Article XI, and should, in particular, contribute to the development of States Parties' capacities to implement the Convention.

In addition, the full implementation of the provisions of Article X is essential for the protection against threats of chemical weapons. The Africa Group encourages all States Parties to fully implement their obligations under Article X and to continue to contribute to the voluntary fund for assistance on a regular basis, so that the OPCW could be in a position to develop a state of readiness to provide timely, adequate and effective assistance and to respond positively to the increasing demands of States Parties for assistance, particularly to the victims of chemical weapons.

The Group commends the efforts made during the Ninety-Eighth Session of the Executive Council and the Twenty-Sixth Session of the Conference of the States Parties in addressing the matter of transfer of funds out of the International Cooperation and Assistance Division (ICA) programmes. We note with satisfaction the inclusion of the Africa-Group proposal in the decision on the biennial Programme and Budget of the OPCW for 2022-2023 which amongst others notes with concern that in past years there have been several transfers of not fully utilised funds out of the ICA, in accordance with the financial rules and regulations. As mentioned in the decision, we reiterate our call upon the Technical Secretariat and States Parties to work collectively with a view to ensuring the full and effective implementation of the ICA programmes, by ensuring that the relevant OPCW's budgetary requirements are effectively met and programmes delivery are promptly executed, in order to avoid or to reduce the need for transfers between major programmes, including consideration of the retention of unspent funds for ICA in a special fund. The Group looks forward to the full implementation of the above recommendation and remains ready to engage in further consultation on this subject.

The Group acknowledges the efforts of the working group on the manner of appointment of the External Auditors of the OPCW by the Conference of the States Parties pursuant to C-25/DEC.10 (dated 21 April 2021). With reference to the EC-101/DEC.7, we look forward to the adoption of the decision on the procedure and the selection criteria to be considered in the appointment of an External Auditor for the OPCW.

The Africa Group welcomes the results and achievements of progress made in the implementation of the fifth phase of the OPCW Programme to strengthen Cooperation with Africa on the Convention as reported in the Note by the Director-General EC-101/DG.12 C-27/DG.8 (dated 7 September 2022) the outcome of the meeting of National Authorities of States Parties in Africa on 31 May to 02 June 2022 and the two meetings of the steering committee held on 24 June and 15 November, 2022. We note the ongoing consultations concerning the conception of the sixth phase of the Africa Programme, including during the twenty-fourth annual meeting of National Authorities held from 22 to 25 November 2022, and look forward to its launch, and to build on the achievements made under the current phase of the Africa Programme. To guarantee its sustainability, the Group reiterates the importance of future phases of this programme being fully funded under the regular budget of the OPCW and remains open to discussion with the Technical Secretariat and all regional groups on this matter. The Africa Group expresses its appreciation to the States Parties that continue to support this programme.

We call on the Technical Secretariat to continue developing tailor-made programmes focusing on regional and subregional priorities, including the development of laboratory capacities and centres of excellence. We recall the Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation between the OPCW and the Africa Union and encourage further regular engagement between senior officials of the two organisations in order to strengthen cooperation between them towards the implementation of the Convention. The participation of such officials at regional high-level fora will play a significant role in this respect.

The Africa Group appreciates the efforts of the Technical Secretariat, States Parties, and other donors who have contributed towards the construction of the OPCW Centre for Chemistry and Technology (ChemTech Centre) and encourages States Parties to continue supporting the Centre and its work. We remain confident that the Centre will play a significant role in promoting international cooperation and assistance aimed at advancing the Organisation's efforts towards capacity building mainly in research and data analytics, forensic and laboratory work, training and knowledge sharing, especially for African States Parties. We look forward to the completion of the project in 2023 for the benefit of all States Parties. We remain ready to engage in any further consultations on options and ideas for capacity building opportunities at the ChemTech Centre.

The implementation of the programme will be a step forward in order to provide the African States Parties with the necessary means to fulfil their commitments under the Convention. In this respect, the Group would like to stress that it is essential to sustain and fully fund all aspects of the Africa Programme under regular budget allocation and is ready to engage in discussions with the Technical Secretariat and all regional groups on this matter.

The Africa Group encourages the Technical Secretariat to continue its efforts to prioritise the strengthening of relevant regional cooperation mechanisms and bodies to further coordinate and ensure synergy at the regional and subregional levels with the perspective to enhance effectively the ownership of all capacity building activities implemented in Africa with the OPCW support.

The implementation of national obligations and measures in accordance with Article VII of the Convention is a cornerstone of the Convention that should continue to be addressed by this august Conference of the States Parties. There is no doubt that full implementation of the Convention contributes to international and regional peace and security.

The Africa Group encourages States Parties and the Technical Secretariat to continue providing appropriate assistance and technical support to States Parties to enhance their national capacities and to carry out their national implementation measures. In this context, national legislations of States Parties should be consistent with the Convention in order to monitor the relevant chemical activities in accordance with the provisions of the Convention and obligations of the States Parties.

The effective domestic implementation of the Convention will play a significant role to prevent the re-emergence of chemical weapons and its use or threat of use by anyone and under any circumstances, in accordance with the Executive Council decision entitled "Addressing the Threat Posed by the Use of Chemical Weapons by Non-State Actors".

In this context, the Africa Group commends the work done by the Open-Ended Working Group on Terrorism chaired by H.E. Ambassador Vusimuzi Philemon Madonsela of South Africa and the Sub-Working Group on Non-State Actors. In addition, the Group believes that the constant coordination between international organisations and relevant stakeholders is crucial in raising awareness, promoting chemical security and advancing global efforts to prevent chemical terrorism as well as the re-emergence of chemical weapons, within the scope of the Convention and the Organisation's mandate.

Mr Chairperson, the Africa Group notes with serious concern the low percentage of employed staff from African States Parties in the OPCW, which deprives the Organisation of the benefits

of a diverse workforce. In this regard, the Africa Group attaches great importance to increasing the presence of Africans at all levels and divisions of the Organisation. We reiterate the need to ensure equitable geographical and gender representation at all levels of the Organisation, particularly in the senior and management positions. We further emphasise that the employment of personnel in the Technical Secretariat of the OPCW should be balanced and transparent.

We welcome the former co-facilitators' recommendations that the unresolved organisational governance and tenure policy issues be discussed during the Fifth Review Conference next year. It is expected that such a move will usher in a renewal of hope and clarity on the logical path the Organisation will follow in resolving the impasse. We look forward to consensual recommendations that will give the OPCW a more competent, diverse and gender balanced work force.

The Group appreciates the efforts by the Chairperson of the Open-Ended Working Group for the Preparation of the Fifth Review Conference, H.E. Ambassador Lauri Kuusing, Permanent Representative of Estonia to the OPCW and the supportive role of the Technical Secretariat to that end. The Group commends the ongoing consultations with stakeholders and remains ready to engage in all consultations regarding the review and evaluation of the provisions of the Convention.

The Group wishes to emphasise, that the destruction of all categories of chemical weapons under strict international verification remains one of the major objectives of the Convention. While the Organisation has mainly focused on this core objective during the past two decades, we consider that the enhancement of the capabilities of the States Parties—particularly in the peaceful use of chemistry—should go hand in hand with the other objectives of the Convention. The future of our Treaty will depend on its full and effective implementation through maintaining a careful balance in resource allocation across all the activities envisioned in the Convention.

The Africa Group reiterates its position against the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere and under any circumstances. With respect to the ongoing work of the Technical Secretariat in Syria, the Group advocates for continuous dialogue with a view to reaching consensus amongst States Parties in addressing any issues of alleged use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic and encourages continuous constructive dialogue and cooperation between both parties on all outstanding issues.

We would like to emphasise that the Africa Group of States Parties to the Convention are fully committed to their obligations under the Convention and are looking forward to the complete destruction of chemical weapons in the shortest time possible.

In conclusion, the Africa Group wishes to reiterate its consistent belief in the merits of the OPCW being a technical Organisation. We encourage all States Parties and stakeholders to work in a spirit of consensus, engagement and close collaboration towards preserving the technical nature of the Organisation for the promotion of international peace and security.

The Africa Group would like to request that this Statement be published on the public website of the OPCW and as an official document of the Twenty-Seventh Session of the Conference of the States Parties.

Thank you.