

**Statement by H.E. Ambassador of Estonia Lauri Kuusing
Permanent Representative to the OPCW
at the Fifth Review Conference – RC5
World Forum, The Hague
15-19 May 2023**

On behalf of the Republic of Estonia,

Let me first congratulate Ambassador Henk Cor van der Kwast, and wish him success as the Chairperson of the Fifth Review conference. Estonia supports you in your efforts. I would also like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude for the honour and trust shown to us throughout the work of the Open Ended Working Group (OEWG-RC). We believe that the Chairperson's draft Provisional Text that is the outcome of 10 months preparatory work by all States Parties is a solid basis for our discussions and eventually for a consensus Outcome Document. Reaching this goal is however a collective effort. In this process obstruction (by a few) cannot equal success and consensus does not equal veto. We should be fortunate to have the Chemical Weapons Convention as there is no substitute to it. Hence, it is our collective responsibility to guarantee its integrity and its full implementation.

Estonia aligns itself with the statement of the European Union, but we will highlight some issues in our national capacity.

Estonia is firmly committed to contributing to the successful outcome of the fifth Review Conference and fully supports the universalisation of the CWC. The CWC and the prohibition of use or threat of use of chemical weapons therein is one of the pillars of the global arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation architecture. It is our duty, as States Parties to the convention, to uphold and strengthen this pillar.

As this is a Review Conference, we cannot turn a blind eye to the use of chemical weapons in the past five years by Syrian Arab Republic, as confirmed by the UN and OPCW; and by the Russian Federation. The violations of the convention must be addressed through independent investigation and attribution, and holding the perpetrators accountable. As part of its aggression against Ukraine, Russia has engaged in an irresponsible campaign of disinformation and state-controlled propaganda in spreading unsubstantiated and unfounded allegations regarding chemical weapons in Ukraine. Not only is it an attempt to divert attention from Russia's own actions in Ukraine, but also a way to discredit the chemical weapons convention as a whole. .

Estonia reiterates its full confidence in the objectivity, impartiality and independence of the OPCW Technical Secretariat and its Investigation and Identification Team. They have been under intense scrutiny and targeted by a systematic and state sponsored disinformation campaign but have shown nothing less but integrity and dedication to the task of upholding the norm against the use of chemical weapons. It is important that the Technical Secretariat maintains the expertise gained from DAT, FFM and IIT.

Mr Chairman,

We also see this conference as an opportunity to take stock of the achievements such as Africa programme, the destruction of declared stockpiles, the Chem-Tech centre, and progress in gender diversity. But we also need to address the challenges, the new and emerging threats, and to keep up with and take advantage of the developments in science and technology.

Improving compliance and solid verification regime are essential for full, effective and non-discriminatory implementation of the Convention. The OPCW and its Secretariat have a key role here. We emphasise their professionalism and impartiality, and the need to maintain their knowledge and expertise. We therefore call on all states to ensure the cooperation and support, including the necessary finances to carry out the tasks for achieving the object and the purpose of the Convention, as well as those related to cooperation and assistance.

Mr. Chairman, dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

I am looking forward to a week of frank, but fruitful discussions. I am certain that genuine efforts to overcome our differences and keeping in mind that consensus doesn't equal veto will amount to a substantial outcome of this conference, and strengthening the Convention and its unique contribution to international peace and security.

I conclude by calling on Russia to stop its more than yearlong large-scale war of aggression against Ukraine and immediately withdraw its military and other personnel from all of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders.

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

Thank you.