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UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR JOANNA ROPER PERMANENT
REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND
NORTHERN IRELAND TO THE OPCW AT THE FIFTH SPECIAL SESSION OF
THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES TO REVIEW THE OPERATION
OF THE CHEMICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION**

Mr Chairperson,
Distinguished delegates,

Twenty-six years after the Chemical Weapons Convention entered into force, we can take pride in many significant achievements. 99% of declared chemical weapons stockpiles have been destroyed, with completion of the task due later this year. Under the leadership of the Director-General, the OPCW remains able to respond to the threat posed by chemical weapons, and support States Parties in implementing their obligations. In a contested and complex international security environment, the Chemical Weapons Convention plays a fundamental role in global security.

Sadly, the job is not yet done. Chemical weapons have been used in recent years, including the novichok attack in Salisbury in the United Kingdom, just over five years ago, and in the poisoning of Alexey Navalny in Russia in 2020. Both are attacks where Russia has responsibility. Russia has failed to provide answers to the most basic of questions, instead emitting disinformation and trying to deflect blame. Russia's reprehensible behaviour is not that of an innocent State.

Russia's unprovoked assault on Ukraine is an egregious violation of international law. We remain deeply concerned about the potential use of chemical weapons by Russia in Ukraine. We have seen Russian State media reports that the Russian military is using riot control agents against Ukraine military units. The Convention is clear - each State Party undertakes not to use riot control agents as a method of warfare. We condemn any use of riot control agents in violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

The comprehensive reports from the OPCW's Investigation and Identification Team have meticulously documented the repeated use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime in Syria, years after joining the Chemical Weapons Convention. The OPCW must retain the skills to impartially investigate cases of chemical weapons use. Attributing responsibility for attacks is fundamental to upholding the object and purpose of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Syria's defiance of its obligations is not limited to past attacks. Syria's initial chemical weapons declaration still has serious gaps. Access for OPCW teams to Syrian facilities remains



restricted, and Syria and Russia's denials continue. We reiterate that Syria must give up all its chemical weapons, stop any banned activity, and comply in full with its legal obligations.

It is imperative that the OPCW remains on top of emerging threats, including any threats from non-State actors. The United Kingdom's working paper on preventing the use of chemical weapons by non-State actors highlights the tools available to us under the Convention. The OPCW must also keep up to date with developments in science and technology, with expert input from the Scientific Advisory Board, and using the impressive resources of the new ChemTech Centre.

The industry verification regime has served States Parties well since the Convention came into force. We must recognise, though, that this regime dates back to the 1980s. Given the advances in science and technology, and structural changes in the global chemical industry, it is time to review the implementation of the regime and consider how best to ensure its continued effectiveness.

International cooperation and assistance are key to implementing the Convention across the globe. The United Kingdom is proud to be supporting laboratories in Latin America to achieve the highest levels of proficiency, as well as supporting work in Africa and the Caribbean to boost preparedness and protection, as foreseen under Article X of the Convention. We have learned a lot from working with Malawi, Nigeria, the Gambia and now Zambia under the OPCW's National Authority Mentorship/Partnership Programme. The United Kingdom has also responded to recent requests for protective assistance from Ukraine.

The OPCW needs to represent the community it serves, and the United Kingdom supports efforts to promote diversity in the Technical Secretariat, including attracting talented employees from all regional groups. The Organisation should also continue to focus on gender, ensuring it embeds gender equality into all its activities.

We recognise the rationale for introducing some flexibility into tenure policy, while respecting the non-career character of the OPCW, in order to retain particular skills and expertise. This needs to sit alongside transparent and rigorous performance management.

A prudent and predictable budget will be essential for the OPCW to continue delivering on its objectives. In tough economic times, we will need to continue exercising strong budgetary discipline to ensure value for money. The recent move to a biennial budget cycle may provide more stability; and the United Kingdom would welcome a review of its implementation.

The OPCW must communicate its purpose and achievements to the wider public. As the trusted global voice on chemical weapons, it is able to speak with impartial expertise. We must counter misleading narratives, keeping a focus on factually accurate information.

We must make best use of the Fifth Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties to Review the Operation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (Fifth Review Conference) to discuss the challenges and priorities ahead; building on the fruitful year-long preparatory process. We will strive for agreement, but we cannot shy away from reality. It is imperative that we work together to consign chemical weapons to the history books.