



REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA

**STATEMENT BY H.E. JOŽEF DROFENIK, AMBASSADOR, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE
REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA TO THE OPCW
AT THE FIFTH SPECIAL SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES TO REVIEW THE
OPERATION OF THE CHEMICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION
The Hague, 15-19 May 2023**

Mr. Chairperson, Director-General Arias, Your Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Slovenia fully subscribes to the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union. I would like to add the following in national capacity:

First, I join others in offering my congratulations to Ambassador Henk Cor van der Kwast for his election as Chairperson of this Review Conference, and extend him the assurances of our trust and cooperation.

I wish to also pay tribute to Ambassador Lauri Kuusing, Chairperson of the Open Ended Working Group, for his skillful leadership of the preparatory process. We appreciated the inclusive and transparent process leading to the draft provisional text. A lot of time and effort has been spent on the negotiation of this text, and we sincerely hope that this Conference will adopt it as its outcome document, and in doing so, provide a clear direction for the work of OPCW in the coming years.

Allow me now, first, a look in the past.

A lot has been done right in the period since the last Review Conference. Over 99% of declared chemical weapons stockpiles have been verifiably destroyed, with full destruction set to be achieved in a few months' time. The Technical Secretariat, under the able leadership of Director General Fernando Arias, has helped many in their national implementation processes, while also enhancing the physical and cyber security of the organization, as well as the diversity of its staff. To keep up with scientific developments, the Conference of States Parties has adapted the Schedules and adopted a new Understanding Regarding the Aerosolized Use of Central Nervous System-acting Chemicals for Law Enforcement Purposes. In March, the Executive Council further enhanced the organization's ability to continue working in challenging circumstances, such as a pandemic, through the so called business continuity decision. And just last week, the opening of the ChemTech Centre marked another significant upgrade of OPCW's capabilities to deliver on its mandate.

But we must also acknowledge the difficulties. While the broad majority of parties respect the prohibition on chemical weapons, a few have fallen short of their responsibilities, and we have seen a most worrisome rise in the cases of chemical weapons use. Most notably in Syria, where chemical weapons have been used in at least nine independently confirmed incidents in the past 10 years, often against civilians. No less reprehensible is the use of small scale chemical weapons for targeted attacks on individuals, such as in the Skripal and Navalny cases. Slovenia resolutely condemns all cases of chemical weapons use and calls for accountability and justice for victims.

In this regard, we are pleased that the OPCW has broadened its toolbox of measures for addressing chemical weapons use, including by bolstering the investigative capabilities of the secretariat. The work of the Syria missions, in particular, has been invaluable for promoting accountability and thus preventing reoccurrence.

We regret that, rather than accepting responsibility and returning to compliance, those associated with cases of chemical weapons use employ obfuscation and, sometimes, outright lies in their attempts to hide the truth. We reject these attempts and hope that others, too, will see through them. Respect for international law is at the core of international order. Without it, chaos reigns, and might is right. We do not accept that, and will continue to stand for the rule of law above all. That is also why we stand with Ukraine in the face of Russia's war of aggression.

Mr. Chairperson,

As we consider, this week, the future of OPCW, I hope that we ensure that it continues to serve as the world's greatest repository of knowledge on chemical weapons and their neutralization. That it remains fit for purpose, including by adapting its verification regime to new developments in science and technology and to the evolution of chemical industry, by continuing to optimize its working processes, and by further enhancing its diversity and gender responsiveness. That it can continue to develop its capacity to address cases of non-compliance and support accountability efforts. We also believe the organization would be well served by a more flexible tenure policy, and by a more transparent process of NGO vetting.

The draft provisional text goes a long way in addressing these issues and we look forward to further discussions on how we can best pursue our joint goal of a world free from chemical weapons.

Slovenia remains committed to it. We wish to build trust, and secure our future – also as a candidate for a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council.

I kindly ask that this statement be considered as an official document of this session and for it to be posted on the OPCW external server and public website.

Thank you.