

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR BONNIE JENKINS, UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE FOR ARMS CONTROL AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY, AT THE FIFTH SPECIAL SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES TO REVIEW THE OPERATION OF THE CHEMICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION

Mr. Chairperson,
Mr. Director-General,
Distinguished Ambassadors and Delegates,

It is an honor to join you today as part of the Fifth Review Conference of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) to evaluate the implementation of the Convention, take stock of the significant achievements of the last five years, and establish priorities for years to come. We are proud of the work that States Parties and the Technical Secretariat (TS) implemented over the last five years – even in the face of an unprecedented pandemic – to further strengthen the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and uphold the international norm against the use of chemical weapons. This Organization has proven, time and again, its ability to adapt, respond, and remain relevant even as the world around us changes in unexpected ways. This responsiveness would not be possible without the dedicated, professional, and impartial work of the Organization’s staff, as well as the political will of States Parties to act when necessary. As we look ahead to the next five years, we must continue to remain vigilant against evolving chemical weapons threats.

The work of the Open-Ended Working Group, under the able leadership of Ambassador Lauri Kuusing of Estonia, has demonstrated that there is broad support across the international community on a number of future priorities for the Organization. States Parties want to enhance international cooperation and assistance while also improving the efficiency of the verification regime. They also want to give the Technical Secretariat the tools it needs to address evolving threats. Those threats include small-scale, targeted chemical weapons use, chemical weapons use by non-state actors, and threats emanating from advances in science and technology. There is also broad support among States Parties that the OPCW should improve its operations; outreach; and diversity and inclusion, including geographic considerations.

The United States also understands the reality that a few countries here would prefer to ignore the past five years of work because it does not align with their political narratives. While the

United States will make a good-faith effort to reach consensus on an outcome document, we cannot undermine or ignore the actions taken by this organization over the past five years, and we will not be deterred from continuing work at the OPCW to hold those who use CW accountable.

The OPCW is a cornerstone of international security, and we must continue to ensure it remains agile and fit for purpose. To that end, over the next five years, the United States plans to spend more than 80 million USD working with international partners to enhance chemical security and prevent, detect, and counter chemical threats worldwide. The United States looks forward to working collaboratively for ways, consistent with the mandate provided by the Convention, to give this Organization the tools it needs to deter and respond to chemical weapons use into the future.

As we are all aware, the Russian Federation continues to wage a premeditated, unprovoked, and unjustified war against Ukraine, with direct implications for this Organization. The response to Ukraine's request for assistance and protection against the use of chemical weapons as provided for under the Convention has been admirable, and we thank the Technical Secretariat and States Parties for their generous contributions. The threat to Ukraine from the Russian Federation, however, remains and we must continue to provide assistance, as required. The United States will continue to provide support to Ukraine, including assistance to protect and respond to any chemical weapons use or chemical incidents. As always, we call on the Russian Federation to end its war of aggression in Ukraine and to fully declare and dismantle its chemical weapons program, which allows for Russia's continued use of substances banned by the CWC. We are all well aware of Russia's use of Novichok nerve agents in 2018 and 2020 to poison Sergei and Yulia Skripal and Aleksey Navalny.

In addition to the material threat the Russian Federation poses to Ukraine, the Kremlin remains the greatest proliferator of disinformation related to chemical weapons. The United States will always stand up for the truth. We will commit 320,000 USD to continue to work with States Parties, non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders to hold public events highlighting independent, fact-based information. We will also continue to promote the work of the OPCW and the accomplishments that States Parties to this Convention have achieved. By countering disinformation about past uses of chemical agents, we not only honor those people who have been victims of chemical weapons use, but also strengthen the global norm against the use of chemical weapons by ensuring our record of success is not undermined by those who seek to promulgate lies.

Unfortunately, despite the best efforts of this Organization, the Syria case file on chemical weapons remains open. Since its establishment in 2018, States Parties have consistently ensured that the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) has sufficient resources to conduct its work. As a result, the IIT has produced three outstanding, highly detailed, and professional reports identifying the Syrian regime as responsible for chemical weapons use in Syria. Along with the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) and the Fact-Finding Mission, the IIT is an essential entity to deter Syria from continuing its chemical weapons program and further chemical weapons use. To ensure that Syria-related investigative work can continue, the United States will work with the OPCW to designate funds for the OPCW's Trust Fund for Syria Missions. We continue to call on Syria to comply with its obligation to fully cooperate with the Technical Secretariat, including by providing immediate and unfettered access to sites in Syria, to enable the Technical Secretariat to conduct its important work, and to completely and verifiably end its chemical weapons program.

I was honored to attend the opening ceremony of the new OPCW Center for Chemistry and Technology (ChemTech Center) on the eve of this Review Conference. This new facility will be fundamental to strengthening the scientific capabilities of the OPCW to include state-of-the-art laboratory analysis, increased storage, and improved physical security. With its robust conference capabilities, the ChemTech Center will serve to further facilitate international cooperation and capacity building. The United States looks forward to utilizing this new facility; we have already committed to partnering with the OPCW to hold several upcoming trainings and exercises at the ChemTech Center next year that will advance shared CWC and chemical security priorities with like-minded partners. We are pleased to announce that the U.S. government pledges to provide 1 million USD to support the ChemTech Center's innovative capacity-building and training projects to further the OPCW's mission to uphold international norms against chemical weapons use and to hold those who violate such norms accountable. We especially look forward to the Center's ability to facilitate trainings to encourage wider geographic representation of the designated laboratory network. Diversity in all aspects is important for sustainment of the OPCW.

We welcome plans to strengthen the OPCW's capabilities for sample analysis and the Director-General's attention to analysis of biotoxins, notably analysis for saxitoxin and ricin, which are listed in Schedule 1. We also welcome the report of the Scientific Advisory Board's Temporary Working Group on Analysis of Biotoxins and especially the recommendation that the OPCW should work closely with the United Nations and its Secretary-General's Mechanism for Investigation of Alleged Use of Chemical and Biological Weapons (UNSGM) laboratory network to facilitate OPCW access to biotoxin analysis capabilities that lie outside the OPCW designated laboratory network.

Given the current security environment and emerging threats, the OPCW must maintain readiness to execute non-routine missions, including investigations of alleged use, challenge inspections, and Technical Assistance Visits. It is also essential that the OPCW support capacity building related to deterring, responding to, and investigating chemical weapons use. We encourage the Technical Secretariat and States Parties to prioritize International Cooperation and Assistance (ICA) programs in the areas of national implementation legislation, customs and border control, national inspectors, lab capabilities, and medical first responders. We are pleased to sponsor through the OPCW's Africa Program a regional conference, "Enforcing Effective Control over the Trade in Toxic Chemicals in Africa," scheduled for May 23-25 in the Republic of Congo.

We encourage the OPCW to continue to improve its operations by supporting gender and geographic diversity, broadening inclusion, and expanding education and outreach. I am pleased to share that the United States will work with the OPCW to designate funds to support a Junior Professional Officer from an underrepresented region. I hope that other States Parties can support similar opportunities so that talented professionals from all geographic regions are appropriately represented within the Organization.

Finally, we must deepen our engagement with stakeholders, including academics, industry, and non-governmental organizations. Ensuring engagement and participation by relevant and experienced NGOs is vital to the continued strength of the OPCW. It is not surprising that some States Parties with the most to hide have blocked participation in the Review Conference of NGOs with relevant expertise. Moving forward, we must work together to find common solutions that can maximize the participation of civil society conducting work relevant to the object and purpose of the Convention at our future events because their voices add value to our discussions.

I would be remiss if I did not highlight the fact that we are on the cusp of a major milestone for the Convention: the complete destruction of the world's declared chemical weapons stockpiles. Despite the pandemic, the United States took extraordinary measures to continue operations at its destruction facilities, including close coordination with the Technical Secretariat to allow on-site verification to continue in an uninterrupted manner. Currently, the United States has completed the destruction of over 99.5 percent of its chemical weapons stockpile, and we remain on track to complete destruction by our planned completion date of September 30, 2023.

We have shown through our actions over the past five years that there is a collective will to keep this Convention and the Organization, deservedly, at the forefront of the arms control discussion. As we look to the future, I hope that other States Parties will join the United States in continuing to champion this Convention and this Organization as vital pillars for international peace and security.

Mr. Chairperson, I request that this statement be considered an official document of the Fifth Review Conference and posted on the external server and the public website.

Thank you.