

STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR THOMAS SCHIEB, PERMANENT  
REPRESENTATIVE OF GERMANY TO THE OPCW, AT THE 104th SESSION OF THE  
EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

(The Hague, 10 – 13 October 2023)

Mr. Chairperson, Director-General, distinguished Ambassadors and delegates,  
Germany aligns itself with the statement delivered by the Permanent  
Representative of Spain on behalf of the EU.

We wish the Chairperson of the Executive Council, H.E. Ambassador Lucian  
Fatu, all the best for chairing the meeting of the October Executive Council.

Germany commends the Director-General, H.E. Ambassador Fernando Arias,  
and the Technical Secretariat for ensuring the effective implementation of the  
mandate of the OPCW. Once again, I would like to confirm that the Director-  
General and the Technical Secretariat can count on Germany's unwavering  
support.

Mr. Chair,

This year CWC states parties completed the destruction of the declared  
chemical weapons stockpiles. This is a great success and a major  
accomplishment for the security of humankind. But we cannot afford to sit  
back and do nothing: The lack of progress in the Syria file remains an open  
assault on the integrity of the Chemical Weapons Convention and one of  
Germany's major concerns.

The Syrian regime has visibly stepped up its diplomatic outreach and activities  
lately. Syria's current or potential partners should be aware that there is not  
the slightest indication that the Syrian regime intends to finally comply with its  
obligations under the CWC and relevant UN Security Council resolutions.

In nine instances UN and OPCW mechanisms have attributed responsibility of  
CW use to the Syrian regime – instances that happened after Syria joined the  
CWC in 2013. The Syrian regime, with Russian backing, continues to evade  
clarifications of these cases. The same applies to its initial declaration and  
suspected activities on its chemical weapons program. Instead of seriously  
engaging with the Technical Secretariat the Syrian regime is continuing its

delaying tactics, as was confirmed at the Technical Secretariat's briefing on 28 September.

Once again, Germany would like to commend the TS and its experts for their highly professional, impartial work and their tireless efforts in trying to move the Syria file forward. However, in view of the lack of progress and the Syrian regime's persistent refusal to respect and implement the decisions by the Policy Making Organs, States Parties need to remain engaged. The Syrian regime's continued non-compliance with the Convention is a most serious concern which should be addressed by the upcoming Conference of States Parties.

Syria should know: There can be no normalization of its status in the OPCW unless it fully and verifiably complies with its CWC obligations as decided by the CSP.

As long as perpetrators of chemical weapons use are not held accountable, potential perpetrators might think they will get away with it. Thus a successful fight against impunity will deter potential chemical weapons users – be they state or non-state actors - and help fight the re-emergence of chemical weapons and their use in military conflict.

Mr. Chair,

Russia has to immediately stop its unjustifiable, unprovoked and illegal war of aggression against Ukraine. It has to completely and unconditionally withdraw from the entire territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders. It is deeply disturbing that Russia is continuing its barbaric and targeted attacks on civilian infrastructure and Ukrainian cities.

Germany is also concerned by reports that Russia has used riot control agents as a method of warfare. Such a use of RCA, if confirmed, would constitute a breach of the CWC and needs to have consequences.

It is hard to believe that Russian state media itself showed the Russian military using tear gas in combat: In a report televised by the Russian First Channel's prime time news journal "Vremya" on May 2nd about combat action in the Donetsk region, a battalion commander of the Russian Army explains that his forces use tear gas dropped from drones to clear out Ukrainian soldiers from their positions.

At the EC in July we called on the delegation of Russia to comment on this report, in particular we asked the Russian delegation whether there has been any reaction to the report and any investigation into the issue.

There was no response from the Russian delegation. Germany is not prepared to simply let this pass. This is why Germany, jointly with a number of States Parties, have requested Russia on 6 October to clarify the matter, invoking Art. IX Para. 2 of the CWC. We are now expecting Russia to provide information within the deadline set by the Convention.

Unfortunately, in the case of use of toxic chemical against Alexei Navalny, the Russian Federation still has neither provided substantial answers to the questions posed by 45 States Parties in the framework of Art. IX, Para. 2, of the Convention, nor has it allowed an international investigation into the assassination attempt. The overwhelming evidence points to direct responsibility of the Russian state, a clear violation of its CWC obligations. Once again, we call on Russia to provide the requested information and to let an international investigation go ahead without further delay.

Mr. Chair,

Notwithstanding the fact that the 5th Review Conference failed to adopt a final document, it is to be welcomed that States Parties are continuing to work constructively on a number of important matters as a follow-up to RC-5.

Substantial Discussions on a possible reform of the industry verification regime in the Industry Cluster are ongoing; the same is true for work on important subjects of institutional governance, i.e. geographical diversity as well as amendments to the tenure policy. Last but not least Germany is looking forward to a substantial discussion on how to improve interaction with civil society and is willing to move the discussions forward.

Mr. Chair,

The end of destruction of the enormous chemical weapons stockpiles accumulated during the Cold War is a huge success for global disarmament and a milestone for the OPCW. However, this success did not seem to have received a lot of global attention. Wouldn't CSP-28 be a good opportunity to celebrate this important milestone in an appropriate manner?

Irrespective of this success, important work remains to be done, including the clearance of old chemical weapons. To this day, Germany declared and destroyed more than 18.000 old chemical weapons, produced mostly during

the two world wars. Work is continuing. Just last week, excavation work began at the "Dethlinger Pond", a site in northern Germany where a large quantity of chemical weapons was buried after the end of the Second World War. This project is expected to take 5 years, and according to current estimates around 30.000 old chemical weapons will be excavated, declared and destroyed over this period. Germany will keep States Parties informed.

Mr. Chair,

Germany hopes that this EC will be able to endorse the bi-annual budget for 2024/25. It is important that the OPCW is well equipped and capable of responding to future challenges, to remain fit for purpose. This is why we support a moderate increase of the budget, which ensures the OPCW remains fully operational to fulfil all its tasks in the light of the current inflationary pressures, without overburdening States Parties who struggle with those very same pressures.

Germany continued its support for the OPCW in 2023 with in-kind contributions, two sets of OPCW inspectors received a 5-day special training called "Hostile Environment Awareness Training". The Laboratory twinning with Algeria is under way, first visits and workshops have taken place. We believe that Africa not only should have, but will have an OPCW-designated laboratory soon.

Before concluding, I would like to commend the Technical Secretariat, under the leadership of DG Arias, once again for its highly professional work in these difficult times.

Mr. Chair,

Germany remains strongly committed to upholding the norm against the use of chemical weapons and to fight against their re-emergence, and we are looking forward to working with the members of the Executive Council in this endeavour.

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

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