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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

**STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR ROBERT P. MIKULAK
UNITED STATES DELEGATION TO THE OPCW
AT THE SIXTY-NINTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Madam Chair,

As the Sixty-Ninth Session of the Executive Council gets under way, I would like to warmly welcome you in your position as Chairperson. Under your guidance, this Council is sure to achieve a great deal in the coming year. You can, of course, always count on the full support of the U.S. delegation in your efforts to lead the Council to continued successful outcomes.

Madam Chair, Mr Director-General, distinguished delegates,

The U.S. commitment to complete chemical weapons destruction remains unwavering. We will faithfully implement this treaty obligation, as well as the additional measures contained in the decision reached at the Sixteenth Session of the Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention. We will continue our destruction programme with full transparency so that others may judge for themselves how we are progressing.

Beginning with this session of the Council, the United States is routinely reporting on our chemical weapons destruction progress within the formal plenary session, consistent with the Conference decision last December. In fact, our “destruction” presentation is really a “construction” presentation, as you just heard today. I am pleased to report that we are making steady progress in building the chemical weapons destruction facilities at Pueblo, Colorado and Blue Grass, Kentucky. We look forward to continuing progress over the summer with construction and systemisation.

The United States has been working closely with the Libyan Delegation and National Authority to help them assess destruction technologies for the chemical weapons previously hidden by the Qadhafi regime. We are impressed by Libya’s commitment to resume chemical weapons destruction as soon as the necessary technical arrangements can be made and other conditions will allow. As I indicated at the Sixty-Eighth Session of the Council, the United States believes that more information is needed to address where the hidden chemical weapons, and the chemical agent they contain, were produced. We look forward to additional clarification in the coming months.

I would like to stress the importance of the work begun since the last Council session by the open-ended working group to prepare for the Third Review Conference. Under the capable chairmanship of Ambassador Nassima Baghli of Algeria, the working group is exploring all



key areas of the Convention's implementation to prepare a draft document for the Review Conference. The open-ended nature of the group and the chairman's inclusive approach means that every delegation can freely express its views. We welcome the broad interest shown by Member States, as indicated by the large number of delegations attending the first meetings. We expect all delegations to use this opportunity to make known their views about the implementation of the Convention. In each area under discussion, all of us should ask ourselves what role these provisions play in achieving the purpose of the Convention, how well implementation has proceeded since the Second Review Conference, and how Member States and the Technical Secretariat can improve implementation in the coming years. This process of evaluation is key to ensuring that Member States are well prepared for a productive, forward-looking Review Conference that will set the course for implementation of the Convention for the next five-year period.

In talking about the Convention and its implementation, I would urge that all of us avoid unnecessarily provoking contentious and pointless arguments about whether one provision or another is most important. No doubt differing views exist, but such arguments can only lead to a political and semantic dead end. All the provisions of the Convention must be effectively implemented.

The Verification Implementation Report (VIR) for 2011, which is also on the agenda, demonstrates that comprehensive and reliable reporting of ongoing verification activities is well established. The United States appreciates the efforts of the Technical Secretariat in presenting such an enormous volume of data in a very useful form. We note the continuing improvement in the accuracy of the information provided. Also, we appreciate the continued evolution and expansion of the VIR format and the help this provides to States Parties in assessing the implementation of the verification regime. In our view, delegations should consider how this valuable information can provide insight about how to improve verification.

An important agenda item at this session of the Council is the Council's schedule for 2013. We must decide how many sessions are essential in order to do the Council's work. Based on the experience of 2008 and the likelihood that the Council agenda will not be as demanding as in 2012, the United States believes that three sessions in 2013 would be adequate to accomplish our mandate in 2013. Holding an Executive Council session in May, a few weeks after the Third Review Conference in April, we judge is unnecessary. Additionally, not all Council sessions require four days to complete their work. In fact, we hope that the current session can be completed in three days. This is but one aspect of ongoing consideration of ways to improve the efficiency of the Council. The U.S. delegation shares the concerns that led the distinguished Brazilian Ambassador to propose informal consultations. We look forward to resumption soon of those consultations, in line with the approach agreed to at the Sixty-Eighth Session of the Council.

I would now like to put forth U.S. views on two additional topics of importance to States Parties that are not on the agenda for this session.

The Technical Secretariat has just presented the OPCW's draft programme and budget for 2013. It is essential that the programme and budget take into account the extraordinary financial stresses that face the governments of many Member States. In fact, in many countries austerity measures have been put in place, including hiring freezes, pay freezes, or even pay cuts for government employees, as well as substantial reductions in travel and procurement. The OPCW needs to tighten its belt too. We cannot justify—to the people that

provide the funding—practices for the OPCW that are more generous than the national ones that they must follow. I am certain that many Member States, including the United States, will not support the proposed increase in assessments. In fact, we will seek a decrease. Under these circumstances, it is especially important to streamline the structure and procedures of the Technical Secretariat to eliminate inefficiency and marginal activities. This process must take into account the non-controversial aspects of the report of the external consultant. Since the number of inspectors has declined substantially, we expect to see a decrease in the 2013 budget in the number of support staff as well, as we already indicated in 2011. Furthermore, although some programmes have steadily increased in the past, this cannot be sustained in 2013. The United States strongly believes that OPCW mission requirements, including the funding of the Third Review Conference, can be fulfilled with a budget significantly below that for 2012.

Unfortunately, the time available for consideration of the budget this year is shorter than usual. Only three weeks are available for discussions in September before the Seventieth Session of the Council begins. We strongly support the suggestion that at least two meetings be held in July to hear the Technical Secretariat's detailed explanation of the proposed budget.

Recent developments in the Middle East remind us that the Organisation must be in a position to respond to today's challenges and tomorrow's potential challenges around the globe involving chemical weapons. We must all look beyond our own comfort zones and consider how the OPCW can improve its ability and timeliness to respond to chemical weapons-related crises—for example, attempted or suspected transfer or use of chemical weapons.

Unfortunately, I must at this point add a few remarks to respond to statements made earlier today by another delegation. Iran has alleged once again that the United States has not been in compliance with the Convention, and once again we rise to set the record straight.

Iran has alleged once again that the United States was not in compliance with the Convention in the manner in which it recovered and destroyed pre-1991-era chemical weapons in Iraq. Let me reiterate: our immediate destruction of these weapons did not violate the treaty and indeed was necessary to support the object and purpose of the treaty. It was also necessary to protect our forces, the local populace, the environment, and the stability of Iraq. Our actions were fully consistent with our Article I obligations to "never under any circumstances develop, produce, otherwise acquire, stockpile or retain chemical weapons." The United States rejects as totally unfounded any allegation that it violated the Chemical Weapons Convention in these unusual and unforeseen circumstances.

Indeed, the detailed procedures in the Verification Annex of the Chemical Weapons Convention regarding reporting, destruction planning, destruction, and verification were not suited for the circumstances that prevailed in Iraq during this time period. As a practical matter and as a security matter, such procedures could not have been applied under such circumstances. As confirmed by subsequent events, it would not have been possible for the Technical Secretariat to fulfil the role assigned to it by these procedures.

In conclusion, I would like to request that this statement be circulated as an official document of the Sixty-Ninth Session of the Council. Thank you, Madam Chair.