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FRANCE

**STATEMENT BY MR LAURENT PIC
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF FRANCE TO THE OPCW
AT THE SEVENTY-NINTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairperson,

I associate myself with the statement made by my colleague, Mr Pierre-Louis Lorenz, Ambassador of Luxembourg, on behalf of the European Union.

Dear Francesco, I am delighted that you have been elected as Chairperson of the Executive Council, and I am convinced that you will lead our discussions with your usual energy. I would also like to pay tribute to your work, Madam Deputy Director-General, and look forward to welcoming your successor, Mr Hamid Ali Rao, to The Hague.

In our turbulent world, the sustainable elimination of the terrible threat posed by chemical weapons is more essential than ever. This is why it is so important to achieve universality of the Convention, and why the reported visit of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Myanmar and the Ambassador of South Sudan to The Hague this week is good news. The progress towards accession made by these two States and Angola should be praised and, as the Director-General said in his opening statement, sends a strong signal to those States that have not yet ratified the Convention to do so.

Over the past few months, the Technical Secretariat has initiated a discussion about the future of our Organisation. At a time when 90% of the worldwide stockpiles of declared chemical weapons have been destroyed, the evolution of the OPCW's role must be considered, and the discussion that has begun is therefore necessary. It must be carried out in a dispassionate, inclusive, and orderly fashion, and in a spirit of mutual trust. It must allow our Organisation to remain the key player that it has become in regard to any issue concerning the threat of chemical weapons, in particular through the effective prevention any re-emergence of such weapons. This objective, fully in line with the spirit of the Convention, will be attained only if the OPCW ensures the preservation of its technical expertise, which depends on the availability of skilled and experienced inspectors, maintains a credible verification regime, and draws on all the lessons learned from the experience of previous years.

In this connection, verification activities under Article VI must continue to play a central role. Effective verification goes hand in hand with national implementation of the Convention by all States Parties, in accordance with Article VII. Activities relating to cooperation and assistance under Articles X and XI will also help to ensure that the Organisation is better



equipped to deal with changes in the world and to respond to new threats. In this regard, care should be taken to ensure a proper alignment between the activities of the working group on terrorism, whose discussions are usefully informed by the Technical Secretariat's work regarding non-State actors, and the efforts to implement the relevant articles of the Convention.

The initial discussions on the Organisation's budget for 2016 are under way and should provide an opportunity to examine proposals relating to a new organisation of the Technical Secretariat. This work will have an impact on the future of the Organisation and its role. In our view, priority, and it is a question of defining priorities, should be given to the core of the Organisation's activity, that is to say verification, with outreach and education initiatives playing a supplemental role. Similarly, France will pay close attention to any measures that have an impact on the preservation of linguistic diversity which, far from being a luxury, is a valuable asset for our Organisation. Be assured that France will remain vigilant in this regard.

Furthermore, the OPCW will be better managed if it can rely on predictable resources. Our individual and collective responsibility is therefore to ensure this predictability by paying our contributions on time. Accordingly, we invite the States Parties, which are at times more than one year in arrears, to comply with their obligations.

We have every confidence that you will lead our work on these various subjects to a successful completion in the coming months. But right now, the Syrian dossier, in all its aspects, sadly still constitutes the greatest challenge faced by our Organisation.

Over the past four months, allegations of the use of chlorine gas, in particular in Idlib province, have multiplied, further adding to the dismay of a population already hit hard by this never-ending conflict. Never has the number of victims of the Syrian conflict been so high. Under these circumstances, how can our Organisation, whose historic mission is to rid humanity of the threat of chemical weapons, consider that the Syrian chemical weapons dossier is ready to be closed? How can our Council, whose decision of 4 February 2015 is routinely flouted, remain inactive? Quite the contrary, our responsibility is to do everything we can to put an end to this situation, to ensure that the decisions of our Council, like those of the United Nations Security Council, are respected and implemented.

For this reason, we welcome the Director-General's determination in deciding to continue the Fact-Finding Mission, which we expect will shed light on all of these allegations. France fully supports this mission and pays tribute to the work and professionalism of the teams of the Technical Secretariat, which carry on with their work under difficult circumstances. As stipulated in our decision of February 2015, the use of chlorine gas as a weapon shall not go unpunished. This is why the current discussions in New York are so important, as they aim at establishing a mechanism to identify those responsible, which will complement the work already accomplished by the OPCW. We hope that these discussions will be concluded as soon as possible. We owe this to the victims of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic.

However, in order to completely end the threat of the use of chemical weapons against the Syrian population, verification of the Syrian initial declaration remains an imperative of the utmost importance. This task falls to the Declaration Assessment Team, to which we offer our renewed support. In this connection, the last meeting of this Council revealed that there is still a long way to go before all of the doubts can be lifted in regard to the completeness and

sincerity of the initial declaration, and before we can be sure that there no longer exists any capacity that could lead to the re-emergence of the chemical threat in future in the Syrian Arab Republic. At this stage, the unanswered questions, the omissions, the inconsistencies, the lack of evidence attesting to the complete destruction of certain agents, the discovery of traces of undeclared agents, and the silence of the Syrian Government with regard to entire segments of its programme are all elements that continue to give cause for the greatest concern. So long as there are doubts, the assessment team should continue its work. It is time for the Syrian Arab Republic to stop prevaricating, to fully cooperate with this fundamental work, and to provide the answers to show that any rebuilding of the Syrian chemical programme in future is impossible.

All in all, what we expect from the Syrian Arab Republic is for it to respect all the obligations arising from its accession to the Convention. The same also applies to its financial obligations, which means that the Syrian Arab Republic must pay its contribution to the OPCW, finance the destruction operations, which are fully its responsibility, and decide that it will take best advantage of the European Union's readiness to authorise the use of frozen assets to cover the costs of the verification and destruction operations associated with the elimination of its chemical programme. The Syrian Government knows full well that the European Union in fact provides a large share of the humanitarian aid to the population that is subjected to its repression. So, let it to stop using bogus arguments and other pretexts to avoid facing up to its obligations, all of its obligations, and nothing but its obligations.

I thank you and would ask that this statement be considered as an official document of the Seventy-Ninth Session of the Executive Council, and that it be published on the Organisation's official website and extranet server.

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