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**STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE EUROPEAN UNION
DELIVERED BY H.E. MR PIERRE-LOUIS LORENZ
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF LUXEMBOURG TO THE OPCW
AT THE EIGHTIETH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairperson,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union.

The candidate countries The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Albania, the country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the EFTA countries Iceland and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia align themselves with this statement. Andorra, Monaco and San Marino also associate themselves with this statement.

I would like to thank the Director-General for his comprehensive statement, which as always provides useful guidance for our work. I also wish to reiterate our appreciation to him and to the OPCW staff for their commitment to the work of the Organisation and to their efforts regarding the ongoing Syrian chemical weapons operation in particular. We are looking forward to participating actively in the deliberations during this week.

I seize this opportunity to express our warm welcome to the new Deputy Director-General H.E. Ambassador Hamid Ali Rao and to assure him of our continuous support in his endeavours.

Despite the considerable progress achieved in the destruction of the declared Syrian chemical weapons and production facilities, we find ourselves once more in the regrettable situation where this Executive Council must also acknowledge many uncertainties regarding the dismantling of the Syrian chemical weapons programme, notably the gaps and contradictions contained in the Syrian chemical weapons declarations and the continuous use of chlorine as a weapon by the regime against innocent civilians that we strongly condemn.

The EU remains very concerned about ongoing reports of toxic industrial chemicals being used as weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic. Use of chemical weapons by anybody, anywhere and under any circumstances is abhorrent and must be roundly condemned. As in previous cases, we have not failed to observe that according to the reports of the Fact-Finding Mission, chlorine has been dropped from helicopters, an asset that only the Syrian Government possesses.



In this respect, the EU supported the Executive Council decision at its Forty-Eighth Meeting and welcomed United Nations Security Council resolution 2209 (2015) which condemned the use of chlorine as a chemical weapon in the Syrian Arab Republic as a violation of both resolution 2118 (2013) and of the Chemical Weapons Convention. The EU strongly supports resolution 2209 (2015) which decided that those responsible for such acts must be held accountable, and that any future use will trigger Chapter VII measures under the United Nations Charter.

In the same vein, the EU welcomes the adoption of United Nations Security Council resolution 2235 (2015) setting up a Joint Investigative Mechanism to identify perpetrators of chemical attacks in the Syrian Arab Republic. The international community cannot remain silent when challenged by the use of chemical weapons; this resolution gives a clear mandate to the United Nations to use the OPCW expertise and attribute these intolerable attacks. We also believe that its establishment constitutes an important step against impunity and a deterrent to discourage the use of toxic industrial chemicals as a means of warfare. We remain united in our determination to ensure that those responsible for these horrific acts are held accountable.

The EU fully supports the decision of the Director-General to continue the important work of the FFM. It is also important that the Director-General continues to brief the United Nations Security Council on the findings of the FFM in coordination with the Secretary-General as necessary and in line with the Council's decision of February 2015. The professionalism and commitment of the staff working within the FFM is exemplary. We call on all parties in the Syrian Arab Republic to extend their full cooperation to the FFM and to ensure that it can carry out its work in a safe, independent and effective manner. We look forward to the next reports of the FFM on allegations of use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic.

The EU reiterates its concern about the insufficient information provided by the Syrian Government regarding questions arising from the discrepancies and inconsistencies in its initial declaration and the subsequent Syrian explanations to the Technical Secretariat. It is regrettable that despite raising specific concerns repeatedly in the past, these worrying discrepancies have still to be addressed: including the lack of original documentation, undeclared R&D facilities, the fate of the 2000 aerial bombs that the Syrian Arab Republic claims to have converted, various questions concerning a ricin programme, the actual role of the SSRC in the Syrian chemical programme, the lack of information about small caliber munitions and, the recent analytical findings in relation to the samples taken by the DAT, showing traces of chemicals directly linked to the production of VX and sarin. The list remains long and after the eleventh mission of the Technical Secretariat to the Syrian Arab Republic the list of open questions has become even longer. In this vein, we reiterate our call on the Syrian Arab Republic to take all necessary measures to provide sufficient verifiable evidence that it does not retain chemical capabilities and that its chemical weapons programme is fully declared and completely and irreversibly dismantled. The EU urges the Syrian Arab Republic to submit its historical overview document as it has announced a long time ago to States Parties. It goes without saying that the Executive Council needs to continue to monitor the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic closely and must remain seized of the matter. After 15 months of intense consultations with the Technical Secretariat and five compelling reports, during which more new questions arose than those that found satisfactory answers, it is time for the Syrian Arab Republic to face its responsibilities.

The EU again calls on the Syrian Arab Republic to respect the Convention and fully meet all its obligations as specified in Article IV paragraph 16 of the Chemical Weapons Convention regarding the costs arising in connection with the elimination of its chemical weapons programme and the verification thereof. The EU reiterates its proposal to use the Syrian “frozen assets” to this end, which if accepted, would represent a positive contribution in this respect. It is disappointing that the Syrian Arab Republic has to date rejected that option. The Syrian Arab Republic must meet fully its obligations under the Convention. It is not acceptable for the OPCW to let a State Party seek any excuse to avoid facing its financial responsibilities.

Turning to other points of concern, we would like to welcome Iraq’s report on actions it has undertaken in order to assess the situation regarding the allegations of use of chemical weapons by non-State actors on its territory. We appreciate that Iraq keeps the Executive Council informed on actions it may take on this matter. We also welcome any cooperation Iraq would seek with the Technical Secretariat in order to address this serious issue.

We underscore that universality remains one of our principal challenges. In this respect we express our appreciation for the recent accession of Myanmar and we welcome the news that Angola has deposited its accession instrument on 16 September. We call upon the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Egypt, Israel and South Sudan to join the Convention without delay. In the same vein, the European Union is encouraged by the information provided by the OPCW that one of the remaining States not Party is close to acceding to the Convention and is looking forward to the swift completion of this process. The EU, through its latest voluntary financial contribution, continues its active support to the Technical Secretariat’s efforts in reaching this common objective. We also stress our willingness to assist new States to meet their obligations under the Convention.

Regarding the destruction of declared stockpiles and verification thereof we took note of further delays in the relevant scheduled activities. We call on the possessor States to complete the destruction in the shortest time possible in accordance with the provisions of relevant decisions of the Conference of the States Parties. We look forward to the planned completion of destruction operations at four of Russia’s seven CWDFs before the end of 2015, a task that the EU, EU Member States and many other States Parties have supported with financial assistance to establish the facilities.

As further progress on destruction is made, we progressively move from disarmament of chemical weapons to preventing their re-emergence. We welcome the note by the Director-General on the future role of the Organisation. We also welcome his initiative to organise a retreat of Ambassadors on this issue that took place on 1 October. We look forward to working constructively on its conclusions. The EU wishes for a successful security and disarmament organisation that will remain relevant in front of the new challenges. In its future role, the OPCW will need to retain or enhance several of its capabilities and primarily ensure an adequate verification regime, including investigations of alleged use and challenge inspections. In this respect the effective implementation of Article VI verification regime is key in preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons. It goes without saying that the Organisation should continue to ensure that staff has the necessary skills and expertise to meet its operational requirements. The EU supports the important recommendations contained in the SAB’s Working Group Report on Verification which aim at strengthening the Chemical Weapons Convention verification regime.

The EU stresses the importance of OPCW's close work with other stakeholders and in particular with the relevant international organisations including the BTWC, ISU CTBTO and IAEA. The close cooperation between the United Nations and the OPCW in the Syrian operation produced many valuable lessons to be learned. These should be evaluated and the results shared and followed within the Organisation. The mutual benefits of regular engagement and cooperation with other stakeholders, including the chemical industry and civil society, ought to be fully explored. In this respect, we take good note of the reports of the SAB which provide valuable guidance regarding developments in science and technology. Unfortunately, the global security environment is changing, and the OPCW needs to adapt its work accordingly. We expect the Open-Ended Working Group on Terrorism under its new Chair to look into some of these new challenges and to make useful relevant recommendations.

National implementation of the Convention in accordance with Article VII remains a core objective and the EU urges all States Parties to put in place and enforce all necessary legislative and administrative measures. We support the work of the facilitator on Article VII and look forward to his recommendations at the outcome of his extensive interaction with all geographical groups. The European Union acknowledges the often very serious challenges and competing priorities some States Parties face. We continue to assist in this area, not only through the new voluntary contribution, but also through extensive outreach. We also support the Technical Secretariat's efforts to explore new ways of achieving progress in this area through tailor-made solutions, including through education and outreach.

The European Union attaches great importance to the work carried out under Article X, which constitutes one of the core pillars of the Chemical Weapons Convention. The European Union encourages all States Parties to submit adequate and timely declarations under Article X and to increase offers of assistance. It is of the utmost importance that the OPCW continues to focus on the capacity of the Technical Secretariat to support States Parties to prevent, respond to and mitigate misuse or attacks involving toxic chemicals. The Technical Secretariat should broaden its cooperation with other relevant international organisations on emergency response to the use or threat of use of chemical weapons. In this respect, cooperation with the regional EU Centres of Excellence can be of particular importance. The recently held ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) Workshop in downgrading the dangers posed by chemical threats co-chaired by the Philippines and the EU is an example in point.

The European Union stands ready to discuss concrete proposals put forward under Article XI, in accordance with the relevant decision taken by the Third Review Conference in April 2013. In the light of recent developments in different parts of the world, we acknowledge the importance of action to promote chemical safety and security.

The EU actively supports the OPCW activities regarding assistance, protection and international cooperation directed to States Parties from all regional groups with particular emphasis placed on support to the OPCW's Programme for Africa. The most recent EU Council decision for the years 2015-16 contains many projects designed to advance work in this area. We encourage States Parties to take advantage of the assistance provided through these funded activities, by participating in them according to their own needs.

Finally, the Member States of the European Union, whose contributions amount to more than 40% of the OPCW budget, have taken note of the draft Programme and Budget for 2016 and contributed actively in the relevant consultations. Several aspects of this draft have come to the centre of serious examination and several delegations have pointed out the need to approve a Programme and Budget which will allow the Organisation to discharge of its core tasks and activities and remain relevant amidst the emerging challenges. We seize this opportunity to call on States Parties that are in serious arrear of payment of their annual contribution. By not paying what they owe to the OPCW, they take a big responsibility in disturbing the financial balance of the Organisation.

In closing, I would like to request that this statement be circulated as an official document of this session of the Council and be published on the OPCW website and extranet.

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