



OPCW

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ESTONIA

**STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE EUROPEAN UNION
DELIVERED BY H.E. AMBASSADOR PEEP JAHILO
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA TO THE OPCW
AT THE EIGHTY-FIFTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairperson,
Mr Director-General,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

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

The candidate countries Albania and Turkey, as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Norway, Ukraine and Georgia also align themselves with this statement. Andorra, Monaco and San Marino also associate themselves with this statement.

We thank the Director-General for his introductory statement and reiterate our appreciation to him and to the OPCW staff for their commitment to the goals and work of the Organisation often in particularly challenging circumstances.

As of this session, the process for the nomination of the new Director-General for the years 2018 to 2021 has started and we will have the opportunity to listen to the presentations of the seven candidates regarding their vision for the future of the Organisation and its sound management in view of the present and new challenges. We stress that the selection process should be open, transparent and fair and the new Director-General should be selected based upon merits and capacity to advance the goals of the Convention and its full implementation.

We find it shocking and deplorable that this Council – and indeed the world – are still confronted with continued use of chemical weapons or chemicals used as weapons. The use of sarin in the attack of 4 April in Khan Shaykhun, as confirmed by the recent OPCW's Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) report, is totally unacceptable. This case and the use of sulfur mustard in Um-Housh threaten international peace and security and constitute clear violations of the norm against chemical weapons use. They warrant appropriate action in accordance with the Convention and as envisaged in the relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions. The EU reiterates its strong belief that the use of chemical weapons by anyone, be it State or non-State actors, anywhere and under any circumstances is abhorrent and must be rigorously condemned and that those responsible for such acts must be held accountable.



The EU fully supports the efforts of the FFM to investigate allegations of use of chemical weapons. We call on all parties in the Syrian Arab Republic to extend their full cooperation to the FFM staff and to ensure that it can carry out its work in a safe, independent and effective manner. In parallel, the Director-General should continue to inform the United Security Council, within the framework of Security Council Resolution 2118 (2013), in coordination with the United Nations Secretary-General as necessary. We also welcome the start of work by the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) on both cases based on recent reports from the FFM to attribute responsibility to the perpetrators for those cases deferred to it by the FFM in accordance with its renewed mandate.

The EU notes that OPCW inspectors have now been given access to the SSRCs Barzah and Jamrayah to conduct their work in compliance with EC-83/DEC.5 (dated 11 November 2016) decision. The EU urges the competent Syrian authorities to continue to take further steps in order to fully implement this decision. The EU recalls that the Director-General stated in his report to the Eighty-Second Session of the Executive Council that due to the Syrian response the OPCW cannot confirm that the Syrian declaration is “accurate and complete”. The EU strongly supports the work of the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT), but condemns the fact that even today, almost four years after Syria’s accession to the Convention, the list of outstanding unresolved issues, questions and ambiguities remains long. To date, the Syrian Arab Republic has clearly failed to provide scientifically or technically plausible explanations on a number of important and substantial issues, including the presence of several undeclared chemical warfare agents. The JIM recently similarly reported a continued lack of Syrian response to its requests for information. Overall, the conclusion is inescapable that the Syrian Arab Republic has failed to provide clear evidence that it has irreversibly dismantled its chemical weapons programme and put its chemical weapons beyond use. The EU is deeply concerned that the Syrian Arab Republic’s chemical weapons may still exist and could be used in the Syrian Arab Republic or might fall in the hands of terrorist groups.

The EU regrets the fact that the Syrian Arab Republic has to date rejected the option to use its “frozen assets” to fully meet all its obligations as specified in Article IV paragraph 16 of the Convention regarding the costs arising in connection with the elimination of its chemical weapons programme and the verification thereof.

The EU also expresses its continued concern regarding the alleged use of the nerve agent VX at an airport in Malaysia on 13 February, welcomes the Director-General’s offer of support to Malaysian investigations, and invites Malaysia to keep the Executive Council informed of its investigations into this matter in accordance with decision EC-84/DEC.8 of 9 March 2017.

Turning to other issues on the agenda we underscore that universal adherence to the Convention remains a top priority for the EU. We once again call upon the United Nations members not yet Party to the Convention, namely, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Egypt, Israel and South Sudan, to ratify or accede to the Chemical Weapons Convention without delay, and without conditions, thus contributing to the goal of a world free of chemical weapons. The EU, through its voluntary financial contributions and relevant action, will continue its active support to the Technical Secretariat’s efforts and stresses its willingness to assist new States Parties to meet their obligations under the Convention.

We call on the possessor States to continue their efforts to complete the destruction of declared stockpiles and verification thereof in the shortest time possible in accordance with the provisions of relevant decisions of the Conference of the States Parties on the final

extended deadlines. It is recalled that the EU and EU Member States have financially supported visits by Executive Council representatives to facilities in the possessor States Parties in the interest of transparency.

The EU expresses satisfaction with the progress of destruction of the remaining Libyan Category 2 chemical weapons at the GEKAmbH facility in Germany. The EU and its Member States confirm their readiness to continue to support the full implementation of the destruction plan and in particular the decontamination of the former storage site at Al-Ruwagha.

We remain concerned with allegations of use of chemical weapons by non-State actors on the territory of Iraq. We invite Iraq to keep the Executive Council informed about its investigations and welcome the support of the Technical Secretariat. This also applies to the destruction of the remaining chemicals at Al Muthana.

Regarding the future priorities of the Organisation, the EU believes that the OPCW must remain a successful security and disarmament organisation and relevant in the face of new challenges. The EU Member States contribute constructively to the relevant discussions of the dedicated open-ended working group whose Co-Chairpersons deserve our appreciation. Proliferation challenges as well as the risks of re-emergence of chemical weapons should be given adequate attention.

It is imperative that the Organisation continues to have staff with the necessary skills, expertise and experience to meet both operational requirements and contingencies, including verification pursuant to Article VI, as well as possible challenge inspections or investigations of alleged use. We would like to commend the work of the Secretariat in assisting States Parties in their declaration process. In this respect we encourage States Parties to make full use of the SIX submission system. In order to respond effectively to advances in science and technology, including the convergence of chemistry and biology, the EU supports the work carried out by the members of the Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) and encourages continued substantive discussion on the implementation of the SAB Technical Working Group's recommendations for strengthening the Convention's verification regime. The EU also welcomes the recommendations made so far by the Advisory Board on Education and Outreach (ABEO) and also the steps taken by the Secretariat to respond to them. The recommendations will make an important contribution to understanding and raising awareness of the Convention among scientists and the wider public.

Dialogue with other relevant international organisations, such as the BTWC ISU, the CTBTO, the IAEA and the WCO has proven fruitful and we are looking forward to it developing further. The close cooperation between the United Nations, WHO and the OPCW in the Syrian operation has also produced many valuable lessons learned that should guide our work in the future. In the same vein, regular engagement and cooperation with all stakeholders, including the chemical industry, academia and civil society, ought to be further and fully utilised.

The European Union considers that full and effective national implementation of the Convention in accordance with Article VII is an important way for States Parties to help prevent the use of chemical weapons by non-State actors. We acknowledge the often very serious challenges and competing priorities some States Parties face regarding national implementation of the Convention and therefore support the broad range of assistance

measures available to help with this important task. The EU will continue assisting in this area through the new voluntary contribution.

The EU encourages all States Parties to submit adequate and timely declarations under Article X and to increase offers of assistance. The European Union will continue to support activities related to protection, assistance and international cooperation. We believe that cooperation with the regional EU Centres of Excellence can be of particular importance in this direction and we are looking into the relevant proposal by the Technical Secretariat. 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 the current international security situation, we believe that the OPCW must take action to promote chemical safety and security and to address these challenges including in cooperation with other regional and global actors. The European Union is gravely concerned about the risk of non-State actors acquiring and using toxic chemicals, which has already become a dark reality in the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq. The implementation of all Articles of the Convention constitutes a tangible contribution to the global security and to the effort to prevent and respond to acts of chemical terrorism by non-State actors. The EU believes that the OPCW has a role to play when it comes to prevention of and response to chemical terrorism. This Organisation—and this Council—has to prove to the international community that they are aware of this threat and ready to take necessary steps to counter it. The EU, therefore, supports a draft decision on this issue to be adopted by this Council as soon as possible.

In this context, we support the work of the Open-Ended Working Group on Terrorism and of the Sub-Working Group on Non-State Actors and we look forward to States Parties and the Secretariat working together to help those groups produce useful relevant and practicable recommendations.

Finally, we wish to thank the Director-General for presenting the 2018 Programme and Budget. The Member States of the European Union, whose contributions amount to more than 40% of the OPCW budget, will contribute actively in the relevant consultations. The Member States of the EU support the need for a Programme and Budget, which will allow the Organisation to discharge its core tasks and activities and remain relevant amidst emerging challenges. We seize this opportunity to call on States Parties that are in serious arrears of payment of their annual contribution to pay what they owe to the OPCW immediately. By not paying what they owe to the OPCW, they are hampering the effective functioning of the Organisation and are reducing the resources available to support States Parties in need of assistance.

Thank you Mr Chairperson.

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