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PANAMA

**STATEMENT BY H.E AMBASSADOR WILLYS DELVALLE
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF PANAMA TO THE OPCW
AT THE EIGHTY-SIXTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairperson,

Ambassador Sheikh Mohammed Belal, as we begin this Eighty-Sixth Session of the Executive Council, the delegation of Panama welcomes you and reaffirms its full willingness to advance the agenda that Your Excellency, in your capacity as Chairperson of this great Council, has set before us today.

But before we begin, our delegation would like to welcome Director-General Ambassador Ahmet Üzümcü and express gratitude for the updates in his opening statement, as the information that he has shared first-hand is an essential part of the work and commitment of the members of this Executive Council, and all of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Likewise, we voice our recognition of the Bureau, a team comprising both technical and administrative collaborators or the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, whom we also thank for the efforts that they carry out day after day and whom we wish to recognise for their hard work; even though they may sometimes feel they are invisible, we know that they are there and that we can count on their work.

At this moment, the delegation of Panama would like to address two essential issues:

First of all, in March this year, this Executive Council adopted a decision on holding proceedings to elect a new Director-General requesting Your Excellency to invite the States Parties to nominate candidates by the end of June.

Further, we asked to hold discussions as soon as possible on questions related to the straw polls following the nominations and other measures that you, as Chairperson, would find appropriate.

Mr Chairperson, we have no doubt that Your Excellency responded to our request, published notes, moved forward with consultations, held numerous meetings, and has been committed to developing an open and inclusive process for each of the phases of this process.



As a member of the Executive Council and on the occasions required in its capacity as Coordinator of the Latin American and Caribbean Group (GRULAC), the delegation of Panama unofficially voiced its willingness to serve the Organisation on this delicate task.

We find it prudent to revisit this issue because we must recognise your dedication and professionalism, as Your Excellency has created an atmosphere of openness and transparency, and specifically respected the human element of this process at all times, based on a dialogue focussing on a solid understanding and consensus, and because your actions demonstrated your confidence in the multilateral system.

Panama wishes to extend its congratulations to the delegations and their candidates in this process, all of whom are highly valued professional and worthy of the greatest respect.

The Republic of Panama maintains its firm conviction that the management of dialogue-based paths to resolve any differences on the international arena by strengthening the multilateral system is one of the key tools in the work aimed at serving humankind, and as such, we are confident that this special task for the OPCW will result in consensus support for a candidate for the post of Director-General, H.E. Fernando Arias, to whom we have already wished success.

Second, our delegation is pleased to inform the Executive Council of the positive results of the Agreement between the OPCW and the Republic of Panama governing the inspections on San José Island, dated 12 July 2017, after having successfully concluded the destruction plan for eight items of old chemical weapons.

Panama has been consistent and shown perseverance in carrying out all actions—both diplomatic and technical—required to achieve this goal. For this reason, every precaution was taken in developing destruction activities, and all national norms were respected together with the highest applicable standards of safety; furthermore, efforts were taken to verify that no damage had been caused to the health or safety of any human being during this process, and that no substantial or permanent damage impacted the environment.

The destruction of old chemical weapons is the result of an historic cooperative agreement on meeting an international commitment in strict adherence to and with full respect for the Chemical Weapons Convention—a commitment undertaken and accomplished together with the international community.

The team had at its disposal an inter-institutional body of Panamanian citizens who, in collaboration with the National Authority of Panama for the OPCW, and with the cooperation provided by the United States of America—whom we thank for said cooperation—have completed a joint operation within the designated timeframe.

What has been very important throughout this entire process is the accompaniment of the technical verification mission deployed by the OPCW Technical Secretariat; this team carried out hard work under special conditions on San José Island from 13 to 25 September this year.

Panama recognises the experience and professionalism demonstrated at all times by the OPCW experts who were on site performing verification activities. The Republic of Panama

formally extends its gratitude to the Director-General and the OPCW's technical team for their support throughout this entire process.

It is with great satisfaction that I inform the Executive Council that this past 4 October, the destruction of the last old chemical weapon that was held on San José Island was verified, and that the preparation of a final report has been started.

Yet our commitment to the Chemical Weapons Convention is stronger than ever.

We welcome the announcement by the Russian Federation of its achievement in completing destruction activities.

The agenda that we are covering is quite full, and we would like to highlight the work of the facilitators of the working groups, a team of diplomats that have put their professionalism and dedication at our disposal at each of the informal consultations that have been organised over the past months.

The administrative affairs of the Organisation take on a relevant role as we encounter new technical and technological challenges, innovative new ideas, and the reorganisation of its administrative structures; we are focussing attention on various requests, as well as the reality that we are working with a limited budget while we look to new training and hiring programmes; we find ourselves facing a future with the need to safeguard an Organisation that is a Nobel Peace Prize laureate.

In this sense, we will be considering draft decisions that are of great importance for the performance of our Organisation, draft decisions that we must analyse. We must accept that the responsibility lies in our hands to uphold high standards, efficiency, and effectiveness.

As we consider the performance of the OPCW, all States Parties are called upon to determine the path upon which the Organisation will progress in both the mid and long terms, and we have entrusted a portion of that work to Ambassador Sabine Nölke of Canada and Ambassador Vusi Bruce Koloane of South Africa, who have been working tirelessly as the Co-Facilitators of the Open-Ended Working Group on the Future Priorities of the OPCW.

At this Working Group's last meeting, we received information from the Technical Secretariat that helps us gain a stronger understanding of the complexity of the system and the scope of the work undertaken by the team at OPCW.

When we are able to clearly understand these functions, we will recognise that as States Parties, we need to initiate a decisive process to search out the mechanism that will help retain our specialised human resources on technical teams and maintain the necessary balance among efficiency, effectiveness, and budget—in the long term.

We need to maintain the inspection regime, the exhaustive verification procedures, and a constant campaign aimed at ensuring that States Parties submit their declarations in the required format in order to guarantee the peaceful use of chemistry.

A new configuration of international reality is envisioned in the joint initiative presented by H.E. Momar Diop, Ambassador of Senegal and Facilitator of the Open-Ended Working Group on Terrorism, and our colleague and Vice Chairperson of GRULAC at this Council,

H.E. María Teresa Infante, the Ambassador of Chile, within her capacity as Facilitator of the Sub-Working Group on Non-State Actors; these Groups have been very active in organising informal consultations.

Within this context, we have noted the report by the Director-General on the progress made and the review of the status of implementation of Article XI of the Chemical Weapons Convention, a dense and detailed document on all of the activities carried out under the aegis of the Convention.

Very soon we will be meeting for the Twenty-Second Conference of the States Parties, which will be followed by the Fourth Review Conference, a moment at which we must unite our efforts to produce proposals and prioritise the objectives that we have committed ourselves to achieving.

The delegation of Panama also notes the Note by the Director-General (EC-86/DG.30) regarding the results of the latest consultations with the Syrian Arab Republic, and it welcomes the high-level efforts and actions taken by the Director-General. Yet we are greatly concerned by what the Director-General has underlined, and I will quote directly from paragraph 20 of his conclusions:

“In light of the aforementioned, the Secretariat is not able to resolve all identified gaps, inconsistencies, and discrepancies in the declaration of the Syrian Arab Republic, and therefore cannot fully verify that the Syrian Arab Republic has submitted a declaration that can be considered accurate and complete in accordance with the Convention or Council decision EC-M-33/DEC.1.”

Panama laments that chemicals can be misused and persistently states that the use of chemicals as weapons can only result in the irreparable loss of human life. It is necessary to consolidate the concept of the peaceful use of chemistry and promote its use for international peace and security.

I request that this statement be included as an official document of this session of the Executive Council.

Thank you.

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