

**STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE EUROPEAN UNION
DELIVERED BY AMBASSADOR KRASSIMIR KOSTOV
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA
TO THE OPCW
AT THE 87TH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL
13-16 MARCH 2018**

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 Turkey, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, 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 and Georgia 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.

Mr Chairperson,

The EU finds it deeply shocking that the international community is still confronted with the use of chemical weapons in Syria despite international law prohibiting them. The use of chemical weapons, including the use of any toxic chemicals as weapons, by anyone, be it a State or a non-State actor, anywhere, and under any circumstances is abhorrent and must be systematically and rigorously condemned.

The EU expresses deep concern in this regard about the reported use of a nerve agent in the UK.

There can be no impunity and those responsible for such acts must be held accountable. As repeatedly stated by the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on behalf of the EU, impunity undermines

attempts to ensure accountability for the confirmed use of chemical weapons in Syria. It damages efforts to uphold the integrity and credibility of the international non-proliferation regime, which the international community has strived to strengthen for decades. The situation is of grave concern to the European Union. Impunity must be kept high on the political agenda. In this regard, we welcome the initiative of France for an “International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons”, which aims at supporting and complementing the relevant multilateral mechanisms.

The EU has consistently condemned confirmed use of chemical weapons by the Syrian Armed Forces and Da'esh. We have taken action as EU by imposing restrictive measures, and will continue to do so if necessary.

The EU is extremely concerned about recent allegations of chemical weapons use in Syria, including in Idlib and Ghouta in recent months. We fully support the FFM's work to investigate all credible allegations of chemical weapons use. 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. The Council of the European Union approved in December 2017 a financial contribution of over 1 million Euro in support of the OPCW's operations in Syria.

Mr Chairperson,

The EU expresses grave concern that Syria has not engaged substantively with the Technical Secretariat to resolve the numerous gaps and discrepancies contained in its CWC Declarations. Even today, more than four years after Syria's accession to the Convention, the list of outstanding unresolved issues, questions, and ambiguities remains long, and has increased over time. In addition, evidence found by the Secretariat points to a large number of non-declared CW agents. To date, 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 still possesses and is using chemical weapons.

The EU regrets to note again that Syria has to date rejected the option to use its “frozen assets” to fully meet 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.

The EU remains deeply concerned about the use of the nerve agent VX at the Kuala Lumpur airport in Malaysia on 13 February 2017. The EU is grateful for the regular updates that Malaysia has provided to the Executive Council on their investigation into this serious matter, and invites Malaysia to keep the Executive Council informed in accordance with decision EC-84/DEC.8 of 9 March 2017.

Mr Chairperson,

Universal adherence to the Convention remains a top priority for the EU. We once again call upon the United Nations members that are 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 or reservations, thus contributing to the goal of a world free of chemical weapons.

Equally important remains universal full implementation of the Convention as stipulated in its Article VII. 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 all States Parties to meet their obligations and implement initial measures under the Convention using tailor-made projects.

We welcome the announcement by the Director-General that Iraq and Libya have completed the destruction of their declared chemical weapons remnants. This development constitutes another step towards a world free of chemical weapons. The Council of the European Union agreed in December 2017 to provide 3,3 million Euro to support the OPCW's efforts to decontaminate the former CW storage site at Al-Ruwagha, Libya.

As we advance towards the 4th Review Conference, the EU believes that the OPCW needs to be able to address new challenges, in particular in the struggle against any form of re-emergence of chemical weapons. The EU Member States contribute constructively to the relevant discussions of the dedicated Open-Ended Working Group under the able leadership of Ambassador Puja of Indonesia. Conclusions of the Council of the European Union are being prepared in this regard and will contribute to the Review Conference preparation process.

We express our appreciation for the work carried out by the Open Ended Working Group on Future Priorities. The document prepared by the co-Chairs is also expected to contribute to the final outcome of the Review Conference next November.

Mr Chairperson,

The Technical Secretariat must continue to recruit and train 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. Regarding recruitment issues, the EU also wishes to underline that gender balance should further be paid attention to throughout the entire organization.

We commend the work of the Secretariat to assist States Parties in their declaration process and encourage States Parties to make full use of the SIX submission system.

The EU supports the work carried out by the members of the Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) in order to respond effectively to advances in science and technology, including the convergence of chemistry and biology. We encourage continued substantive discussion on the implementation of the SAB Technical Working Group's recommendations for enhancing the Convention's verification regime.

The EU encourages the efforts made by the Advisory Board on Education and Outreach (ABEO) in the form of recommendations and welcomes the steps taken by the Secretariat to respond to them. The EU hopes that recommendations focussed on practical implementable outcomes could make an important contribution to

understanding and raising awareness of the Convention among scientists and the wider public.

Dialogue and cooperation with other relevant international organisations and mechanisms, such as the CTBTO, the IAEA, the WCO, and the BWC ISU has proven fruitful and we are looking forward to it developing further. An example in point is the close cooperation between the United Nations, WHO, and the OPCW in the Syrian operation, which has produced many valuable lessons learned that should guide our work in the future.

Regular engagement and cooperation with all stakeholders, including the chemical industry, academia and civil society, ought to be further and fully utilised.

The EU encourages all States Parties to submit adequate and timely declarations under Article X and to consider increasing 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.

The OPCW has an important role to play when it comes to prevention of, and response to, chemical terrorism in cooperation with other regional and global actors. The implementation of all Articles of the Convention and Article VII in particular, constitutes a tangible contribution to global security and to the effort to prevent and respond to acts of chemical terrorism by non-State actors. The European Union is gravely concerned about the risk that non-State actors could acquire and use toxic chemicals. We have seen in the past two years instances of terrorist use of chemical weapons in Syria and Iraq.

In the same vein, 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. The EU, therefore, welcomed the adoption of the relevant decision on this issue.

Finally, we seize this opportunity to call on States Parties that are in arrears of payment of their annual contribution to pay what they owe to the OPCW immediately. By not paying what they owe, 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.