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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR KENNETH D. WARD
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE
OPCW AT THE EIGHTY-SEVENTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairperson, Mr Director-General, distinguished ambassadors and delegates,

This Organisation, the OPCW, was created to relegate once and for all to the past the tragic legacy of chemical weapons. We had all hoped that the entry-into-force of the Chemical Weapons Convention would be such a transformative event that only the routine work of implementation would remain.

The reality -- twenty years later, the OPCW and the Convention are under siege.

We are all aware of the alarming events that occurred in Salisbury, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, on March 4, involving the use of nerve agent against two citizens of the United Kingdom, likely at a local restaurant. Mr Skripal and his daughter Yulia remain in critical condition. A first responder to the scene, Detective Sergeant Nick Bailey, remains in serious but stable condition. We understand that additional people were treated for nerve agent exposure as a result of this heinous attack.

The United States of America expresses our support to those in Salisbury affected by this egregious offense. The United States of America commends the Government of the United Kingdom for its immediate response to this criminal act and its commitment to identify and hold responsible those involved. We support the efforts of the United Kingdom to keep the Technical Secretariat and the Executive Council informed of important developments as they are known. The United States of America is deeply troubled by the developments announced by Prime Minister May of the United Kingdom on March 12 regarding the nerve agent used in the assassination attempt. The United States of America agrees with the assessment of the United Kingdom that the Russian Federation is responsible for the attack on two nationals of the United Kingdom using a military-grade nerve agent—either through deliberate use or through its failure to declare and secure its stocks of this nerve agent. Obviously, the production and use of a nerve agent is forbidden under the Convention. Further, the United States of America shares the view of the United Kingdom that this assassination attempt occurred against a backdrop of Russian aggression, to include the Russian Federation's illegal annexation of Crimea, Russian interference in other countries' national business, the Russian Federation's recent statement about new offensive capabilities in President Putin's State of the Union address, and finally, the Russian Federation's long-standing policy of assassinating dissidents outside of the Russian Federation. We stand with the United Kingdom and the international community to hold the Russian Federation accountable.



Any use of a chemical weapon by a State Party is a violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention and the international norms and standards that this Organisation seeks to uphold. This attack validates a concern that the United States of America has previously raised – that the international norm against chemical weapons use is eroding. All individuals or entities involved must be held responsible. The Executive Council has a responsibility to condemn this attack.

Let me be very clear. This Council has said many times that those who use chemical weapons must be held accountable – both those who committed the crime and those who ordered it. That should be the guiding principle moving forward to address this barbaric act. One of the core objectives of the Chemical Weapons Convention is to rid the world of chemical weapons, thereby excluding completely the possibility that they can be used. The United States of America calls on all Executive Council members to send a message that chemical weapons use will not be tolerated and that there are consequences to using these heinous weapons. We stand in solidarity with our Ally, the United Kingdom.

For the moment, the despicable assassination attempt in Salisbury has become the top headline for chemical weapons. Let us not forget, however, that there is a State Party in this room, the Syrian Arab Republic, who has used chemical weapons. One hundred years after the horrors of World War One, the Syrian Government has repeatedly and systematically dropped chlorine barrel bombs from helicopters on opposition-controlled areas. Echoing the horrors of Ghouta, the Syrian Government dropped an aerial bomb filled with sarin gas on Khan Shaykhun. And the so-called “Islamic State” has introduced mustard gas into the Syrian civil war, raising the global spectre of chemical weapons use by non-State actors.

We are at the edge of a precipice where a new normal, a new era of chemical weapons use, is threatening to take hold. It is woefully naïve to think that the evil genie of chemical weapons can be contained in the Syrian Arab Republic. Absent concerted international action, this scourge is spreading. It has already found its way to Iraq, Malaysia, and just 10 days ago, to the United Kingdom.

The first step in addressing the Syrian Arab chemical weapons crisis is to acknowledge who is culpable for perpetrating these horrendous acts. The United Nations Security Council established the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) – an independent and impartial panel of experts – to serve this essential purpose. While many have been ready to act upon the JIM findings implicating the Syrian Government, others have not.

As the United States of America has underscored repeatedly, the Russian Federation’s actions to shield the Syrian Government from international accountability make it complicit in the Syrian Arab Republic’s use of chemical weapons. Moreover, the Russian Federation’s actions both here and at the United Nations Security Council have signalled to the Assad regime that it can continue to use chemical weapons with impunity. Under such conditions, the recent credible allegations of chemical weapons use by the Syrian Arab Republic can surprise no one. Nor is there a problem of insufficient evidence. The Russian Federation has demonstrated time and again that there is no body of evidence – no matter how damning – which would persuade Moscow to agree to, or act upon, any international finding that its Syrian ally used chemical weapons. The Russian Federation has betrayed the Chemical Weapons Convention and United Nations Security Council Resolution 2118 (2013).

The Russian Federation, however, is only one member of this Council and wields no veto vote here. There are 40 other members of this Council. We have it within our power to address the Khan Shaykhun attack and the broader Syrian chemical weapons crisis. The Syrian Arab Republic has shown itself to be an unrepentant, repeat offender. In escalating its use of chemical weapons from chlorine to sarin nerve agent on 4 April 2017, it has shown it will stop at nothing. This Council, this Organisation, cannot and must not allow this to continue with impunity.

Regrettably, as the OPCW contends with the greatest challenge it has ever faced, there are those on this Council who consider it acceptable to sit on the sidelines. All of us must accept our responsibilities as members of this Council which, according to Article VIII of the Convention, requires that the Executive Council “shall promote the effective implementation of, and compliance with, this Convention.” There is a battle going on here for the soul of this Organisation, but it is not, as some would have you believe, a diplomatic battle between Washington and Moscow. It is a battle between those who seek to uphold and defend the Convention and the international norm against the use of chemical weapons, and those who are pursuing other, self-serving agendas.

This is also why France inaugurated, and the United States of America joined, the “International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons” on 23 January. To date, 25 States have endorsed the partnership’s declaration of principles. The Partnership puts those responsible for the use or proliferation of chemical weapons on notice that they will face a day of reckoning. Their victims will see justice done. As such, the Partnership complements, and is intended to strengthen, the Chemical Weapons Convention, and further seeks to strengthen the international norm against chemical weapons use anywhere. We call upon the community of responsible nations to join this effort to end the use of chemical weapons and impunity for such use.

We must not lose sight of the important efforts that must be undertaken this year to ensure the future effectiveness of the OPCW. We are providing a separate national statement on our goals for the Review Conference which will be attached to the plenary statement when it’s distributed today.

As we contemplate the future, we should all recognise that the Council’s action or inaction with respect to the use of chemical weapons will do more to shape the destiny of this Organisation – for good or ill – than any working groups or Review Conferences.

Almost a year ago, on 4 April, the entire world learned the name of a town in northern Syria called Khan Shaykhun, where more than one hundred people suffered a ghastly death, murdered by the nerve agent sarin. What has been the international response to this grotesque tragedy? So far, only silence. What will be our response to the Russian Federation’s connection to the use of nerve agent in the United Kingdom? Silence? Mr Chairperson, this Council must prove its worth, must prove that the Chemical Weapons Convention is not just a piece of paper, must prove that the OPCW is not just bricks and mortar, and must prove to the world that the OPCW really is working toward a world free of chemical weapons. Otherwise, we are but an empty promise of a better world.

Thank you, Mr Chairperson.

I ask that this statement be made an official document of the session and posted on both the external server and the public website.

Addendum to U.S. National Statement EC-87 -- Preparations for the Fourth Review Conference --

The Open-Ended Working Group on the Review Conference, under the leadership of Ambassador Puja of Indonesia, is making steady progress in preparing States Parties for the Fourth Review Conference in November. And thanks to the efforts of the Open-Ended Working Group on Future Priorities, ably led by Ambassador Sabine Nölke and Ambassador Bruce Koloane, we are well-positioned to collectively address the challenges that lie ahead.

The United States of America shares the view held by many delegations that the Fourth Review Conference should prepare a final document consisting of two major parts – one part which would carefully review the operation of the Convention since the last Review Conference in 2013, and another part which, in learning from the past, prudently plans for the future.

The United States of America is committed to the success of the Fourth Review Conference. What actions must we all collectively take to ensure that success?

- (a) The verification regime implemented by the Technical Secretariat is our most fundamental defence against the possession and use of chemical weapons by State and non-State actors, now and in the future. The Review Conference should take steps to strengthen the regime with respect to all types of verification activities.
- (b) At our Eighty-Sixth Session in October of 2017, this Council adopted a historic decision enshrining the paramount role of the OPCW with respect to preventing and responding to the threat of the use of chemical weapons by non-State actors. The Review Conference should consider next steps in addressing the non-State actor threat and identify additional measures to implement and advance this important initiative.
- (c) There is growing concern with the potential for central nervous system acting chemicals, such as the pharmaceutical anaesthetic fentanyl, to be a serious threat. The United States of America is concerned that some States may be deliberately developing these chemicals for warfare or for other harmful purposes, cloaking these efforts under the guise of non-prohibited purposes, such as law enforcement or medical research. These chemicals have no safe use outside of a controlled medical setting. The Review Conference should promote a common understanding that the aerosolised use of these dangerous chemicals is inconsistent with legitimate law enforcement activities. We can no longer turn a blind eye to the threat posed by central nervous system acting chemicals to the Convention – a threat that will increase, not decrease, in the years ahead unless we take collective action.
- (d) Central to the effective implementation of Articles VII, X, and XI is international cooperation and assistance, including capacity-building. Given the threat of chemical weapons use by non-State actors, it is critical that national implementation

frameworks be in place. However, these are currently lacking in many States Parties. The Review Conference should undertake a range of constructive efforts to address and overcome the challenges many countries face addressing the threat of chemical weapons use by non-State actors.

- (e) And, finally, we must strengthen the OPCW so that it is ready to face any challenge. As attested to by the Nobel Peace Prize adorning the delegates' lounge, the OPCW is perhaps the world's leading arms control organisation, and the world relies on it now to continue to help promote peace and security. The world has come to expect much more from the OPCW, and we must ensure that this Organisation in the years ahead remains up to the task when called upon.

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