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SWITZERLAND

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR URS BREITER
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF SWITZERLAND TO THE OPCW
AT THE EIGHTY-SEVENTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairperson,

As this session is the last one that you are chairing, allow me to convey to you the compliments of the Swiss delegation for the excellent work accomplished throughout the past year. It is with a sense of frustration that I must, as I am leaving my post, paint a gloomy picture of the situation.

Allegations of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic have not ceased; on the contrary, a continuous intensification of hostilities has taken place in recent weeks in the Syrian Arab Republic, with dramatic humanitarian consequences in Eastern Ghouta and in the regions of Idlib and Afrin. The ban on the use of chemical weapons has been undermined by their repeated use in the Syrian conflict. The international community must provide a strong and collective response to the weakening of existing standards. Investigations in the Syrian Arab Republic paint a clear picture. We must take steps to combat impunity in order to strengthen the norm against the use of chemical weapons. Switzerland condemns in the strongest terms the use of chemical weapons by any party. It is essential that those responsible for such serious violations of international law be brought to justice. In this context, we welcome the launch by France of the International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons. We also hope that the OPCW will establish, as soon as possible, a close collaboration with the Impartial and Independent Mechanism on international crimes committed in the Syrian Arab Republic recently established in Geneva.

Furthermore, with regard to the Syrian file, the latest report of the Declaration Evaluation Team (DAT) reports some developments; however, the outstanding issues continue to increase and the vast majority remain unresolved. This is unacceptable. Recent documents transmitted by the Syrian Arab Republic confirm that the Scientific and Research Studies Center has participated in activities associated with the Syrian chemical weapons programme that ought to be declared under Articles III and VI of the Convention. We thank the DAT for their hard work, as well as the Director-General and the Technical Secretariat for their efforts to resolve the outstanding issues related to the Syrian Arab Republic's initial declaration.

In the absence of the renewal of the Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM), and notwithstanding the deafening silence of this Organisation following the gross violations of the Chemical Weapons Convention and the terrible precedent it creates, the work of the FFM remains crucial and we look forward to its next report. The engagement of the OPCW in the



context of the FFM, the DAT and the JIM has clearly demonstrated the importance of its investigative skills, knowledge and methodologies. Switzerland is of the view that these capabilities need to be further developed. It is essential for current and future tasks of the Organisation that the investigative capacity of the Technical Secretariat be strengthened and expanded in a sustainable manner.

The incident that took place in Salisbury in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland a week ago is deeply concerning. We encourage the concerned authorities to collaborate closely with the OPCW and to share any relevant information related to this incident.

I wish to thank the Canadian and South African Co-Chairs of the Open-Ended Working Group on Future Priorities as well as the Technical Secretariat for their circumspect work, which led to the excellent draft recommendations for the Fourth Review Conference. The draft report presents a set of balanced and forward-looking recommendations. Switzerland supports the general recommendations contained in the report and is particularly satisfied that it includes a recommendation to launch a discussion on central nervous system-acting chemicals within the policy-making organs. Once finalised, this report will be useful and necessary in order to continue the discussions in a targeted and effective manner in the Open-Ended Working Group for the Preparation of the Fourth Review Conference.

Regarding the future of this Organisation, Switzerland supports the idea of modernising the OPCW laboratory in order to make it a center of reference and excellence, and to stay abreast of the progress of science and technology. However, there are still many open questions at this stage, especially around the question of funding. We ask that the Technical Secretariat continue to inform the States Parties of developments in this project.

Thank you.

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