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**STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE AFRICAN GROUP
OF STATES PARTIES TO THE CHEMICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION
DELIVERED BY H.E. AMBASSADOR ABDELOUAHAB BELLOUKI
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE KINGDOM OF MOROCCO
TO THE OPCW
AT THE EIGHTY-EIGHTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Madam Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates;

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of African States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention.

First, I would like to welcome H.E. Ambassador Jana Reinišová of the Czech Republic as Chairperson of the Executive Council, and express the Group's full support and confidence in your able leadership to steer the Council sessions during your mandate to a successful conclusion. In addition, the Group takes this opportunity to convey its appreciation to H.E. Ambassador Sheikh Mohammed Belal of Bangladesh on the quality work put forward during his chairpersonship of this Council. The African Group also associates itself with the statement of the Non-Aligned Movement and China States Parties, delivered by the group's Coordinator, H.E. Ambassador Haifa Aissami Madah, the Permanent Representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the OPCW.

The African Group would like to express its gratitude to the Director-General, H.E. Ambassador Ahmet Üzümcü, for his informative and comprehensive statement delivered in this session. We warmly salute his excellent accomplishments during his mandate in promoting and strengthening the role of the Organisation, particularly his personal commitment to the African continent and the disarmament agenda. We take this opportunity to wish him the best in his future endeavours.

Africa's commitment to a world free of chemical weapons remains solid and strong, as reflected by the near-universal intake and absorption of the Chemical Weapons Convention. This is why the African Group welcomes and strongly supports the decision made by the Conference of the States Parties, C-21/5 of 2 December 2016, on the continuation of the fourth phase of the Africa Programme, which began on 1 January 2017, for another three-year period.



In this context, we reiterate our call for the programme to be anchored by the regular budget so as to ensure its predictability and sustainability. In this regard, we appreciate and welcome the ongoing discussions between African States Parties, donors and the Technical Secretariat, as an important step for the achievement of the objectives and purpose of the Africa Programme. We also take this opportunity to reiterate our gratitude to all the voluntary contributors, for making this programme efficient and sustainable.

Accordingly, the African Group welcomes the follow-up mechanism of the Africa Programme, in line with the Director-General's Note of the 27 February 2017, to achieve its concrete objectives. In this regard, we appreciate the pragmatic and inclusive approach adopted by the Director-General to enhance the Africa Programme, as mentioned in the Note of 12 September 2017. To this end, the Group welcomes the first meeting of the steering committee on 02 July 2018 and looks forward to its preliminary report.

The African Group recognises the work done by the International Cooperation and Assistance Division regarding the implementation of the Africa Programme, and encourages the Technical Secretariat to continue its efforts to enhance national capacities for the implementation of the Convention, develop tailor-made assistance and protection activities, and support the establishment of designated laboratories and the peaceful use of chemistry.

The African Group also emphasises its continued support for the OPCW in the area of sensitisation, especially regarding decision makers at the regional organisation, the African Union, and its Regional Economic Communities, through the various special programmes of the Technical Secretariat.

The African Group appreciates the planned upgrading of the OPCW Chemical Laboratory to a Centre for Chemistry and Technology. We are confident that this new initiative will play a significant role in capacity-building in the area of research and training, especially for African countries.

On the destruction of remaining chemical weapons stockpiles, the African Group reiterates its long-standing principled position towards the achievement of complete disarmament under strict and effective international control, in line with the Convention and the policy-making organ's decisions. The African Group commends the complete destruction of all declared stockpiles of chemical weapons in Libya, the Russian Federation and recently in Iraq. In this regard, we encourage the international community to continue its efforts to ensure complete chemical disarmament.

The African Group welcomes the complete destruction of all chemical weapons declared by the Syrian Arab Republic. It also notes the progress concerning the destruction of all facilities in this State Party. We highlight the importance of the continuation of dialogue between the Syrian Arab Republic and the Technical Secretariat on all pending issues, and look forward to positive outcomes of this cooperation. Furthermore, we encourage both parties to continue the implementation of the relevant Executive Council decisions.

The African Group values the merits of the OPCW being a technical Organisation, and encourages all Member States and stakeholders to work closely together to preserve this.

The African Group recognises the importance of the education and outreach programmes in achieving the main objectives of the Convention. The Group welcomes the work done by the Advisory Board on Education and Outreach, including all regional meetings held to contribute to formulating recommendations on education and outreach. The African Group views this programme as an essential tool for enhancing and developing a culture of implementation regarding the Convention, through cooperation with the African Union and the African Regional Economic Communities.

We believe that after 20 years of the entry into force of the Convention, it is necessary that our concerns, especially regarding the equal implementation of the four pillars of the Convention, Articles VI, VII, X and XI, should now be carried out in an efficient manner. This should also be adequately reflected in future budgetary decisions.

The African Group welcomes the nomination of H.E. Ambassador Oji Ngofa of Nigeria as new Chairperson of the Open-Ended Working Group on Terrorism, and appreciates the work achieved by the former Chairperson, H.E. Ambassador Momar Diop of Senegal. We also appreciate the work of the Chairperson of the Sub-Working Group on Non-State Actors, H.E. Ambassador Maria Teresa Infante of Chile. We look forward to the continued facilitation of discussions, in collaboration with the Technical Secretariat, to promote global chemical security. In this regard, the African Group believes that continued coordination between international organisations and relevant stakeholders, within the scope of the Convention and the Organisation's mandate, is crucial to building awareness of chemical security, and advancing global efforts to prevent chemical terrorism and the re-emergence of chemical weapons.

In this context, the African Group welcomes the initiative of the Director-General regarding the organisation of the conference on countering chemical terrorism on 7 and 8 June 2018. Cognisant of the diverse views regarding definitions of chemical terrorism and the concept of non-State actors, the Group emphasises that the implementation of the Convention, and interagency cooperation, could play an important role in addressing this threat. In this regard, the reinforcement of cooperation between the Technical Secretariat and the African Union and its bodies in charge of this matter is highly commended.

Whilst aware that the re-emergence of chemical weapons and the threat of chemical terrorism represent some of the main challenges for the Organisation, the African Group advocates that the future priorities of the OPCW should continue to focus on cooperation and assistance, capacity-building, and the promotion of the role of eco-chemistry in sustainable development.

The African Group commends the concluded work of the Open-Ended Working Group on Future Priorities of the OPCW, under Co-chairpersons H.E. Ambassador Sabine Nölke of Canada and H.E. Ambassador Vusi Bruce Koloane of South Africa. We take note of the working group's final document containing a set of recommendations emanating from previous discussions.

Furthermore, the African Group commends the work done by the Open-Ended Working Group on the Review Conference chaired by H.E. Gusti Agung Wesaka Puja, Ambassador of Indonesia, and pledges its unwavering support for the efforts of this group, with a view to achieving a successful Fourth Review Conference.

In conclusion, the African Group would like to express its strong support to the Director-General designate, H.E. Ambassador Fernando Arias, and commits to working cooperatively with him and the Technical Secretariat to further strengthen the unity of the Organisation and advance the objectives of the Convention.

I thank you for your kind attention.

The African Group would like to request that this statement be published as an official document of this session.

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