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BELGIUM

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR CHRISTIAN LEPAGE
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF BELGIUM TO THE OPCW
AT THE EIGHTY-EIGHTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Madam Chairperson,

Thank you for giving me the floor.

To begin, this is an opportunity to congratulate you on your appointment as Chairperson of the Executive Council (“the Council”) and to commend your predecessor, Mr Sheikh Mohammed Belal, whom I thank for his excellent work as Chairperson, which was punctuated with good humour.

Next, I should like to take this opportunity to thank also the Director-General, H.E. Ambassador Ahmet Üzümcü, for his remarkable work over the past eight years. His efforts to promote the Chemical Weapons Convention (“the Convention”) and its implementation in States Parties, and to ensure compliance with its provisions, deserve to be commended. The final two years of his tenure at the head of the OPCW were unquestionably an unprecedented challenge for this Organisation, which on the whole is well led and managed.

Mr Director-General, I wish you all the best for the future and much success in your next endeavours. The sharing of your knowledge and experiences in the area of disarmament, especially in academic circles, will certainly be most appreciated.

Finally, allow me to tell you that Belgium fully aligns itself with the statement made by H.E. the Ambassador of Austria on behalf of the European Union.

Our work is far from finished. As recently as last week, two British citizens needed to be hospitalised after being contaminated by a toxic nerve agent; sadly, one of the victims later died. I would like to reaffirm my country’s solidarity with the United Kingdom which, for the second time, is facing the effects of the use of Novichok agent on its soil.

Also, the Syrian dossier is far from closed. This is demonstrated by the interim report of the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) on the incident in Douma on 7 April 2018, and by the conclusions of the FFM concerning incidents from last year, including the use of sarin in Ltamenah in March 2017. The OPCW and the States Parties must spare no effort to put an end to this use of chemical agents as weapons.



It is important to promote the use of chemistry for peaceful purposes and to ensure complete implementation of the Convention, and in particular Article VII, in all of the States Parties, where appropriate through programmes of assistance for them. There is also a need for in-depth reflection, in particular with the help of the Scientific Advisory Board, on the challenge posed to the Convention by new types of nerve agents and on the measures to take. The Australian-Swiss initiative, co-sponsored by Belgium and several other States Parties, concerning the use of aerosolised chemicals and their effects on the central nervous system, deserves to be debated in an open and inclusive manner. There is no reference to these agents in the Convention, though these chemicals can also be used as incapacitating agents during hostilities.

I thank you for your attention, Madam Chairperson, and would ask that this statement be considered as an official document of the Eighty-Eighth Session of the Council.

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