

## **THE NETHERLANDS**

### **STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR Paul van den IJssel PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE TO THE ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS**

#### **AT THE EIGHTYEIGHTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL OF THE OPCW 10-13 July 2018**

Madame Chairperson,

As this is the last Executive Council with DG Üzümcü leading the Organization, I would like to express the great appreciation of my country for the outstanding way in which he has led the OPCW. Under your leadership the OPCW has become the most successful disarmament organization, with of course the Nobel Peace Prize in 2013 as the ultimate recognition. Thank you Ahmet for all your work. It was a pleasure working with you, we will dearly miss you. We wish you and your family all the best in the future.

The Netherlands fully aligns itself with the statement delivered by Austria on behalf of the European Union. Let me make in addition a few observations in a national capacity.

I thank the Director-General for his opening statement. For more than four years now, the most pressing issue on the agenda of this Organization has been the elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme.

Two weeks ago the Special Conference of State Parties with an overwhelming majority adopted a decision that confirms the authority of the OPCW not only to investigate if chemical weapons were used, but also to determine who was responsible for the use. The Netherlands was one of many cosponsors of this decision.

I am satisfied proud that the Member States of the OPCW took this decision. This is not only a big step towards accountability and justice, but it should also deter both state and non-state actors from further use of chemical weapons in Syria and elsewhere.

We should not accept such horrendous acts to become normal. Let us hope our step towards attribution will help prevent such attacks from now on, let's hope the norm against the use of chemical weapons will be restored and upheld.

Last week the OPCW/Technical Secretariat released an interim report about the investigation of the attack on Douma on 7 April. It is our understanding that the FFM and Technical Secretariat need more time to reach final conclusions. We are confident that the investigation of the FFM and the Technical Secretariat is carried out thoroughly and with due diligence. We are looking forward to be informed about the final results.

Madame Chairperson,

My delegation has emphasized on many previous occasions that there is still critical work to be done with regards to the initial declaration of Syria. And for the most part, that work is the responsibility of the Syrian Arab Republic. Today, more than four years after its accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention, Syria still has not fully disclosed its chemical weapons programme. This is outrageous and should be remedied without further delay.

Last week we were alarmed by the new incident in the UK, involving again the chemical agent 'novichok'. The investigation about who is responsible is still underway; however, we fully share the concern of the UK authorities about these repeated incidents where weapon grade chemical agent endanger the life of citizens and even have led to the death of one of them. We fully support the UK in its investigations and stand ready to offer assistance when asked.

Thank you.