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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

**STATEMENT BY THE HONORABLE JOHN SULLIVAN
DEPUTY SECRETARY OF STATE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
AT THE FOURTH SPECIAL SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES
PARTIES**

Director General Üzümcü,
Chairperson Bellouki,

It is an honour to join you today at this special session to address the current crisis resulting from the appalling rise in the use of chemical weapons. An overwhelming number of States Parties were in support of calling this special meeting, and it is heartening to see the resolve of like-minded states in solving this crisis.

For much of the Chemical Weapons Convention's long history, the OPCW and States Parties had a singular focus of destroying legacy chemical weapons stockpiles. The use of chemical weapons was an issue for a bygone era, or so we thought, but sadly, that is no longer the case.

State and non-State actors are challenging the international norm against chemical weapons use. Allowing chemical weapons use to continue with impunity threatens our rules-based order and all nations around the world.

Chemical weapons have been used recently, to tragic effect, around the world—in Asia, the Middle East, and here in Europe. The Assad regime has continued to use chemical weapons to terrorise and kill Syrians civilians. In March 2018, we saw the use of an unscheduled military-grade nerve agent in a brazen assassination attempt on UK soil. Last year, the chemical agent VX was used to assassinate Kim Jong-Nam in the Kuala Lumpur International Airport. Further, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria has used chemical weapons repeatedly in Iraq and Syria in recent years. These barbaric acts must stop now.

The United States believes that the OPCW, States Parties, and indeed the Chemical Weapons Convention (the Convention) itself, are up to the task. The Convention can—and should—adapt and remain relevant to the changing security environment.

The OPCW is a Nobel Peace Prize winning organisation for a reason. It has proven its ability to adapt readily to change, to respond ably and quickly to wide-ranging crises, with highly professional and dedicated experts implementing its mission.

The draft decision put forward by the United Kingdom and a number of co-sponsors, including the United States, provides a roadmap to reaffirming the international norm against



the use of chemical weapons. It provides concrete actions to attribute responsibility to those who have violated this value that we all share.

Today, on behalf of the United States, I call on all States Parties to support this decision and to provide the OPCW with the tools it needs to further our shared goals of deterring, preventing, and responding to chemical weapons use.

Removing the ability to use chemical weapons with impunity is a first step towards restoring deterrence against chemical weapons use. We must first empower the OPCW so that it can ably identify those who are responsible for the confirmed instances of chemical weapons use in Syria.

The OPCW Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) has been investigating credible allegations of chemical weapons use in Syria since 2014, and, relying on its cadre of chemical weapons experts, has confirmed such use many times over. Unfortunately, the FFM is limited by its mandate from following the facts to identify those responsible.

The OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) in Syria proved that it is possible, through countless hours and dogged investigative work, to put forward a thorough, independent, and impartial analysis to determine chemical weapons attribution. There is no reason to believe that the same Organisation involved in such work for the JIM is not up to the same task itself. The United States deeply regrets that Russia vetoed the JIM renewal in the United Nations Security Council. Russia has also been campaigning against any action in the OPCW Executive Council on Syria.

The second tool OPCW needs is the ability to build on its existing mandate to assist States Parties in the event of chemical weapons use on their territory. As we have seen in the United Kingdom and Iraq, the OPCW provides States Parties with technical assistance related to national investigations of chemical weapons use. To further provide assistance, the Director-General has established the Rapid Response and Assistance Mission (RRAM). The United States supports the Technical Secretariat expanding assistance options to help States Parties prevent chemical weapons use before it occurs.

Third, is the ability of the OPCW to further facilitate enhanced capacity-building. This includes tools to allow the OPCW to help States Parties to implement their Chemical Weapons Convention obligations, enhance chemical security, and enable international cooperation in the field of chemical activities for those purposes not prohibited by the Convention.

Finally, the OPCW needs to be able to share information with other investigative efforts. This collaboration would allow us to feed into the work and expertise of other investigative mechanisms, such as the Commission of Inquiry and the International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism, which support our goals of ensuring that chemical weapons cannot be used with impunity.

To conclude, I want to emphasise the United States' determination that restoring the norm against chemical weapons use is a collective responsibility that calls for collective action. We are grateful to the diplomatic coalition of countries that are working to uphold the norms against the use of chemical weapons, the International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons and the Australia Group. We must continue to use the partnership

as an instrument to share information on chemical weapons use and counter false narratives. Through the partnership, we can build the capacity of participating States to coordinate our response in the face of chemical weapons use. These economic, judicial, and political arrangements exist for coordinated action. Now is the time to put them into action, to impose serious costs for those actors who make that fateful decision to use chemical weapons. It is absolutely vital that we stand united and use the tools at our collective disposal to deter the future use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere.

Although the drafters of the Convention did not imagine a world where chemical weapons use would increase over time, they nonetheless drafted a treaty that can be responsive to our current environment. Chemical weapons use may have created a crisis, but we, as States Parties can put an end to that crisis by taking decisive action to further enable the OPCW Technical Secretariat to address chemical weapons use and further prevent its re-emergence.

As many of you know, President Trump stated in April 2017: “It is in the vital national security interest of the United States to prevent and deter the spread and use of deadly chemical weapons.” We have taken this to heart and are committed to doing our utmost to stop, and hold accountable, those who use chemical weapons.

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

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