



OPCW

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AUSTRIA

**STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE EUROPEAN UNION
DELIVERED BY H.E. AMBASSADOR HEIDEMARIA GURER
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF AUSTRIA TO THE OPCW
AT THE EIGHTY-EIGHTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Ms Chairperson,
Mr Director-General,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU).

The Candidate Countries Albania, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, and Turkey, and the EFTA¹ countries Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, as well as Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine align themselves with this statement. Andorra, Monaco, and San Marino also associate themselves with this statement.

First of all—as this is his last Executive Council—the EU wants to express its gratitude and appreciation to Director-General Ahmet Üzümcü for his outstanding work and dedication to the OPCW in the last 8 years. The Nobel Peace Prize has been an acknowledgement of the constant efforts of the Director-General and the Technical Secretariat to ensure a world free of chemical weapons. We want to wish you all the best in your future endeavours.

I seize this opportunity to congratulate the new Chairperson of the Executive Council Ambassador Jana Reinišová of the Czech Republic and the other members of the Bureau of the Executive Council on the assumption of your duties, and assure you of our continuous support for your endeavours. The EU would also like to express appreciation for the work carried out by the former Chairperson Ambassador Sheikh Mohammed Belal of Bangladesh and the former members of the Bureau of the Executive Council for their work.

The European Union and its Member States have strongly supported from the outset the initiative to convene the special session of the Conference of the States Parties on 26-27 June in order to preserve and uphold the global norm against the use of chemical weapons, which has been seriously threatened by the repeated use of such weapons since 2012 in the Syrian

¹ European Free Trade Association



Arab Republic, Iraq, Malaysia, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

The European Union notes with grave concern the tragic news that one of the two individuals recently exposed to a Novichok nerve agent in the United Kingdom has passed away. The other remains in a critical condition in hospital and our thoughts are with their family and friends. Following the terrible incident in Salisbury in March this latest development underscores the urgency of upholding the ban on chemical weapons use. The EU stands in solidarity with the United Kingdom's Government and people.

We therefore welcome the adoption of Decision C-SS-4/DEC.3 dated 27 June 2018 Addressing the Threat from Chemical Weapons Use which has condemned the use of chemical weapons by anyone—be it State or non-State actors—and emphasised that the use of chemical weapons anywhere, at any time, by anyone and under any circumstances is unacceptable and contravenes international norms and standards.

This decision is an important achievement in combatting the use of chemical weapons, their proliferation, and impunity for the use of such weapons by enhancing, in particular, the capacity of the Technical Secretariat of the OPCW to identify the perpetrators of chemical weapons attacks. We look forward to the swift work of the Secretariat in taking forward the decision to put in place arrangements to identify the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic, and the Director-General's initial report to the Council on implementation within 30 days of the decision, as mandated.

The European Union stands ready to support the Secretariat and to cooperate with all States Parties in the implementation of this decision.

We express our grave concern at the latest reports of the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission (FFM).

As the Conference has noted with concern, the FFM has identified further uses of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic at Ltamenah on 24, 25 and 30 March 2017 and at Saraqib on 4 February 2018, and noted that the perpetrators of these attacks have still to be identified.

We are particularly concerned by the FFM conclusion that the results of the analysis of the samples collected in Ltamenah on 24 March 2017, where sarin was likely used as a chemical weapon, were consistent with those from the incident in Khan Shaykhun on 4 April 2017 where sarin was used by the Syrian Arab Republic, as confirmed by the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism.

The EU takes note of the Interim Report of the FFM regarding the incident of alleged use of toxic chemicals as a weapon in Douma, the Syrian Arab Republic, on 7 April 2018.

We reiterate our strong support for the ongoing work of the OPCW's Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) in verifying the Syrian Arab Republic's declarations and addressing the gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies therein as identified by the Director-General. The continuing lack of response from the Syrian Arab Republic to the Director-General's letter of 10 April seeking further information, as noted in the Director-General's update to the UN Secretary General on 22 June, is telling. The EU is reminded in this respect of the Conference

decision on 27 June, which demanded that the Syrian Arab Republic immediately cease all use of chemical weapons and declare all of the chemical weapons it possesses, including sarin and its precursors, as well as all chemical weapons production facilities.

In July 2017 and in March 2018, the EU imposed additional restrictive measures on Syrian high-level officials and scientists for their role in the development and use of chemical weapons and is ready to consider imposing further measures going forward.

Regarding the costs arising in connection with the elimination of its chemical weapons program and the verification thereof, the EU regrets the fact that the Syrian Arab Republic has rejected its proposal on the use of the “frozen assets”. It is unacceptable that the Syrian Arab Republic, a State Party, seeks to avoid facing its financial responsibilities and obligations specified in Article IV of the Convention.

The EU continues providing substantial financial support for the operations of the OPCW in the Syrian Arab Republic. On 12 December 2017, the Council of the EU adopted a Decision on the provision of situation-awareness products to enhance the security of the FFM, including delivering satellite imagery products to the OPCW to ascertain the status of the road network. The Decision, which extends the EU's support to the continued implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 2118 (2013) and the OPCW Council decision EC-M-33/DEC.1 on the destruction of Syrian chemical weapons, provides for a budget of more than EUR one million.

As we advance towards the Fourth Review Conference in November, the EU reiterates that the OPCW has an essential role as a global security and disarmament Organisation. It needs to be able to address new challenges, in particular in the struggle against the re-emergence of chemical weapons.

On 16 April 2018, the EU adopted its position relating to the Fourth Review Conference. The EU considers that the Review Conference should have the ambition of ensuring the relevance as well as increasing the effectiveness and capacity of the Convention, including addressing current and future challenges. The EU will contribute constructively to achieving consensus in the outcome of the Fourth Review Conference, while pursuing the following key objectives to be reflected in the Review Conference outcome document:

- (a) to strengthen the Convention by building on the progress achieved so far in destroying declared stockpiles of chemical weapons and the prevention of their re-emergence, through inter alia enhancement of the Convention's verification regime and improvement of national implementation, as well as efforts towards achieving universality;
- (b) to strengthen the Convention by considering ways and means to deal with the use of chemical weapons in violation of the Convention;
- (c) to strengthen the Convention by ensuring its effective implementation in light of the changing security environment and developments in the global chemical industry, science and technology, and through emphasising that the Fourth Review Conference should provide political support and broad guidance for the work to be undertaken in the inter-sessional period on the future priorities of the OPCW;

- (d) to contribute to a full review of the operation of the Convention, particularly taking into account scientific and technological developments, including new production technologies, as well as building a solid foundation for addressing future challenges that the Convention will face.

Universal adherence to the Convention remains a top priority for the EU. We once again call upon all States not yet Party to the Convention, namely, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Egypt, Israel and South Sudan, to ratify the Chemical Weapons Convention without delay or reservations, thus contributing to the goal of a world free of chemical weapons.

Of equal importance is the full implementation of the Convention as stipulated in Article VII. The EU, through its voluntary financial contributions and relevant action, will continue its active support for the Technical Secretariat's efforts, and stresses its willingness to assist States Parties to meet their obligations under the Convention by means of tailor-made projects.

The EU supports the work carried out by the members of the Scientific Advisory Board (SAB). We encourage continued substantive discussion on the implementation of the SAB Technical Working Group's recommendations for strengthening the Convention's verification regime. We welcome the SAB report on new types of nerve agents, which is valuable in terms of informing further debate on what to do about the challenge that these agents pose to the Convention.

The EU also encourages the efforts taken by the Advisory Board on Education and Outreach (ABEO) in the form of recommendations and welcomes the steps taken by the Secretariat to respond to them.

Dialogue and cooperation with other relevant international organisations and mechanisms, such as the CTBTO², the IAEA³, the BWC ISU⁴, the WCO⁵ and the WHO⁶ has proven fruitful and we are looking forward to it developing further. Regular engagement and cooperation with all stakeholders, including the chemical industry, academia and civil society, ought to be fully utilised.

The European Union will continue to support activities and international cooperation related to the protection and assistance stipulated under Article X. We believe that cooperation with the regional EU CBRN⁷ Centres of Excellence can be of particular importance in this regard and we are looking into the relevant proposal by the Secretariat. The EU stands ready to discuss concrete proposals put forward under Article XI, in accordance with the relevant decision taken by the Third Review Conference in April 2013.

² Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty Organization

³ International Atomic Energy Agency

⁴ Biological Weapons Convention Implementation Support Unit

⁵ World Customs Organization

⁶ World Health Organization

⁷ Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear

We believe that the OPCW, in cooperation with other regional and global actors, has an important role to play when it comes to the prevention of, and response to, chemical terrorism. The implementation of all Articles of the Convention, and Article VII in particular, constitutes a tangible contribution to global security and to the effort to prevent and respond to acts of chemical terrorism by non-State actors. We commend the Technical Secretariat for organising the first Conference on Countering Chemical Terrorism on 7-8 June 2018. In the same vein, we support the work of the Open-Ended Working Group on Terrorism and the Sub-Working Group on Non-State Actors and we look forward to their recommendations. Last, but not least, we encourage the Director-General to ensure that due regard is given also to gender when selecting Secretariat personnel.

I would kindly ask you, Ms Chairperson, to distribute this statement as an official document of the Council and to publish it on the public web-site of the Organisation.

Thank you.

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