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AUSTRIA

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

Madam 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, and Montenegro, and the EFTA (European Free Trade Association) countries Iceland, and Norway, members of the EEA (European Economic Area), as well as Georgia, and Ukraine align themselves with this statement. Andorra, Monaco, and San Marino also associate themselves with this statement.

The EU congratulates Ambassador Fernando Arias on his appointment as the new Director-General of the OPCW. The EU looks forward to continuing its close cooperation with the OPCW and its new Director-General as the Organisation plays a crucial role in upholding rules based global order, effective multilateralism, and international law. You can count, Ambassador, on the EU's full support in your activities.

The EU remains strongly committed to a successful outcome of the upcoming Fourth Review Conference, which should ensure the CWC relevance and increase its effectiveness and capacity to address current and future challenges. To this end, the EU will promote a detailed list of essential issues laid down in the EU position adopted by the Council of the European Union on 16 April.

The EU Member States are actively involved, on this basis, in the work of the Open-Ended Working Group for the Preparations to the Review Conference. We congratulate Ambassador Puja from Indonesia as Chairperson of the OEWG and assure him in our full support for his endeavours to secure agreement on the outcome document of the Review Conference.



The Fourth Review Conference is set to take place against the backdrop of international efforts to reaffirm and reinforce the global norm prohibiting chemical weapons, which has been repeatedly undermined, including very recently on European soil.

To this end, the EU welcomed the adoption of Decision C-SS-4/DEC.3 Addressing the Threat from Chemical Weapons Use. It is a crucial step on the path towards combatting impunity for the use of chemical weapons. The Decision directs the Technical Secretariat of the OPCW to put in place arrangements to identify the perpetrators of chemical weapons attacks in Syria, and enables OPCW assistance in identifying perpetrators, organisers, sponsors or otherwise involved whenever chemical weapons use occurs on the territory of a State Party, if requested by a State Party affected.

This decision also aims at strengthening the OPCW in other aspects, in particular assistance, international cooperation, and verification.

We thank the Director-General for his report on the initial implementation of Decision C-SS-4/DEC.3, circulated on 27 July 2018, and the DG's report for this Executive Council meeting EC-89/DG.29, dated 4 October 2018, and would like to assure him of our continued commitment to the implementation of the Decision as stated by the EU Heads of States and Governments on 28 June. We look forward to further details from the Director-General on implementing the Decision. We support, inter alia, the Technical Secretariat's endeavour to establish the arrangements necessary to identify the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic as soon as possible.

We express, furthermore, the EU's full confidence in the report, issued on 4 September 2018, of the OPCW Technical Assistance Visit carried out upon request by the United Kingdom. The OPCW analysis confirms the UK findings about the identity of the toxic chemical used during the incident in Amesbury, United Kingdom, on 30 June. It is the same nerve agent that was found in the biomedical and environmental samples relating to the chemical attack in Salisbury, United Kingdom, a reckless attack which threatened the lives of many and led to the death of Dawn Sturgess.

The EU reiterates its strong condemnation of the attack in Salisbury on 4 March 2018 and recalls its agreement with the assessment of the United Kingdom Government that it is highly likely that the Russian Federation is responsible and that there is no other plausible alternative. We reaffirm our solidarity with the United Kingdom in the face of this grave challenge to our collective security. The EU calls on Russia to provide immediate, full, and complete disclosure of its Novichok programme to the OPCW. The EU supports the United Kingdom's efforts to bring those responsible to justice and takes note of the attempted murder charges brought against two individuals.

In April, the offices of the OPCW were targeted by a hostile cyber operation carried out by the Russian military intelligence service. The EU expresses serious concerns about this attempt to undermine the integrity of the OPCW. We deplore such actions which undermine international law and international institutions.

Madam Chairperson,

We express our grave concern at the reports of the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) on the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic and reiterate our strong support for the work of the FFM and the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT). The Director-General's "Report on the Work of the Declaration Assessment Team" (dated 1 October 2018) concluded that the Syrian Arab Republic has not provided any new information that could contribute to resolving any of the outstanding issues identified in relation to its initial declaration and related submissions. The Secretariat remains unable to resolve all of the identified gaps, inconsistencies, or discrepancies in the declaration of the Syrian Arab Republic, and therefore cannot fully verify that the Syrian Arab Republic has submitted a declaration that can be considered accurate and complete in accordance with the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Council decision EC-M-33/DEC.1.

We must, therefore, recall that Decision C-SS-4/DEC.3 noted with concern that the use of CW by the Syrian Arab Republic, by direct implication, establishes that the Syrian Arab Republic failed to declare and destroy all of its chemical weapons and chemical weapons production facilities (CWPFs) and 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 CWPFs.

On 28 May 2018, the Council of the EU renewed the restrictive measures against the Syrian regime until 1 June 2019. Some of the measures in question are meant to counter chemical weapons proliferation and use, as well as to sanction a number of persons and entities responsible for chemical attacks and chemical weapons development.

We take this occasion to inform that in its conclusions of 28 June 2018 the European Council called for the adoption as soon as possible of a new EU regime of restrictive measures to address the use and proliferation of chemical weapons. Extensive work has been carried out in this regard within the working bodies of the Council of the EU. We expect the sanctions regime to be adopted by the Council of the EU shortly.

Madam Chairperson,

Universal adherence to the Convention remains a top priority for the EU. As acknowledged in the Secretariat's Note on the Review of the operation of the Chemical Weapons Convention since the Third Review Conference, the universalisation efforts of the OPCW Secretariat have been financially supported by the EU within the framework of three consecutive Council Decisions. We support the development and implementation by the Secretariat of targeted, tailor-made approaches on achieving the universality of the Convention, in close coordination and cooperation with States Parties. Hence, we welcome the Director-General's Annual report on the implementation of the Action Plan for the universality of the Chemical Weapons Convention and support the strategy of the Secretariat to focus its activities in this area on a bilateral approach.

The EU continues to support activities related to national implementation, assistance and protection, international cooperation and in particular the Africa Programme, including through its dedicated Council Decisions. We believe that cooperation with the regional EU CBRN Centres of Excellence can be of particular importance in this regard. We welcome the progress in the implementation of the Africa Programme in 2018 as outlined in the Director-General's Note dated 5 September 2018.

We also encourage the DG to continue to recruit staff with the necessary skills and expertise, with due regard also to securing geographical and gender balance among Technical Secretariat staff and OPCW activities.

Finally, we wish to thank the facilitator Mr Hassan Zeran from Chile and all the States Parties involved in the consultations on a draft Programme and Budget of the OPCW for 2019. The EU stresses the need for ensuring a timely adoption of the Programme and Budget for 2019. The Member States of the European Union, whose assessed contributions amount to more than 40% of the OPCW budget, have contributed actively in the relevant consultations.

Once again, we seize this opportunity to call on States Parties that are in arrears of payment of their annual contribution to pay what they owe to the OPCW immediately. By not paying what they owe to the OPCW, they are hampering the effective functioning of the Organisation and are reducing the resources available to support States Parties in need of assistance.

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.

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