

Statement by H. E. Jana Reinišová, Permanent Representative of the Czech Republic to the OPCW, at the 4th Review Conference of the Chemical Weapons Convention

Mr. Chairman,
Mr. Director General,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Czech Republic fully aligns itself with the statement delivered by Mr. Jacek Bylica on behalf of the European Union. I would like to make a few remarks in my national capacity.

We as states parties meet every five years to formally review the operation of the Chemical Weapons Convention. But the review is not something that happens just once every five years, it is rather a continuous process spanning the whole period between the review conferences. Let me take you back the retreat of Ambassadors held in in October 2015 and focused on the future of the OPCW. At that time, it seemed that the destruction of the declared chemical weapons was coming to an end and the focus of the discussion was on the role of the organisation once this main task is completed. Topics which were mentioned included safeguarding the expertise and capacity of the organisation, achieving universality of the Convention, enhancing cooperation between states parties and between the OPCW and other international organisations, or increasing assistance to states parties in order to help them fulfil their obligations under the Convention. It was also stressed that it was necessary to further develop the cooperation with industry and non-governmental organisations. All of the above, of course, was to take into account the developments in the field of science and technology, including ensuring the proficiency of the network of the designated laboratories.

All of what we discussed 3 years ago at that retreat remains true today and we have made great strides in many of the issues that I have mentioned. However, unfortunately, this progress is threatened by something which we thought would never happen again, namely a number of cases of use of chemicals weapons by state and non-state actors in several countries around the world, Syria, Iraq, Malaysia or the United Kingdom. This re-emergence of the chemical weapons use is a serious danger to collective security that must be combatted by the international community. It must also be the focus of our discussions here at this conference.

In these cases of use, we must be able to gather all the available information and evidence, including the identification of those who are responsible. Therefore, the Czech Republic supported and welcomes the adoption of the decision of the Special Session of the CSP in June of this year and expects that it will be fully implemented. It is a clear signal to everyone that further breaches of the Convention in this respect will not be tolerated and that there will be no impunity for perpetrators of chemical weapons attacks. In the same vein, we welcome that an overwhelming majority of states parties supported the draft programme and budget of the OPCW for 2019 at the Conference of States Parties earlier this week. This will enable the organisation to continue all of its activities, including the implementation of the crucial decision of last June.

We welcome the proposals submitted by the Director General regarding the implementation of the decision and would like to express our full confidence that the staff of the Technical Secretariat will approach this task with the same high level of professionalism and objectivity which they have clearly demonstrated in other activities, such as the Fact Finding Mission or the Declaration Assessment Team.

Mr. Chairman,

The threats to the Convention are evolving and it is necessary that we respond to them effectively. In this light, the Czech Republic welcomes the recent proposal by Canada, the United States and the Netherlands for an update of the list of Schedule 1 chemicals to include two new families of chemical agents, including one which was recently used in the UK, and which have no known use for purposes not prohibited by the Convention. The Czech Republic also expresses its support to the initiative led by Switzerland and Australia which calls for further discussions in the policy making organs of the OPCW on central nervous system-acting chemicals. We would also like to thank France for launching the International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons, of which the Czech Republic is a member. It is a valuable platform, complementary to the OPCW, which allows for information sharing among members with the goal of bringing those responsible for chemical attacks to justice.

Mr. Chairman,

Allow me to turn now to the area of capacity building and international cooperation. The Czech Republic has long been very active in the field of assistance and protection. We believe that it is crucial that all states parties have the capacity and capability to prevent and to respond to chemical threats. In this respect, the Czech Republic has been supporting OPCW activities in education and training of experts from around the world, under the umbrella of Article X of the Convention. We do this both by hosting training courses on our territory and by sending instructors to other regions, mostly to east Africa and Latin America, to conduct trainings there. We believe that these courses are very good examples of effectively building capacity to respond to chemical threats and we are committed to continuing these activities in the future as well. For those interested in concrete examples on how programmes under Article X of the Convention have helped in several regions around the world I would like to highlight a side-event on this topic that will take place tomorrow during the lunch break.

Mr. Chairman,

Let me conclude by reiterating that the Czech Republic strongly believes in the multilateral approach to security, disarmament and non-proliferation as the best way of maintaining international peace and security. This organisation has in the past 21 years proved how successful this approach can be. We are now at a critical moment where we have to, on the one hand, continue our work on destruction, verification, assistance and cooperation and, on the other hand, make sure that we prevent the re-emergence of use of chemical weapons. It is our hope that all states parties will join forces to fulfil these difficult tasks.

I would like to request that this statement be considered an official document of the Conference and be published on the public website of the Organization.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman