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SWEDEN

STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR ANNIKA MARKOVIC PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF SWEDEN TO THE OPCW AT THE EIGHTY-NINTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Madame Chairperson,
Director-General,
Distinguished colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me first of all warmly welcome you, Ambassador Arias, as our new Director-General. You can count on the full support of Sweden over the coming years. I thank you for your opening statement, outlining the important issues that lie before the Executive Council.

It is a great honour to take the floor for the first time as Sweden's permanent representative to this important organisation. I am looking forward to working with all of you in the years to come. Sweden is aligned with the statement delivered by the Ambassador Gürer of Austria on behalf of the European Union. I would like to add, in my national capacity, a few remarks.

Sweden was dismayed to learn about the attempts by Russian military intelligence to hack into the OPCW server. It is one thing to seek to develop narratives for political gain that counter the will of the vast majority of States Parties to fight impunity for chemical weapons use. It is quite another to use illegal measures by cover of diplomatic protection in this way. As a strong believer in multilateralism and in the right for organisations like the OPCW to work freely and independently without undue influence, we deplore these actions.

This leads me to the attempted murder on 4 March, which led to the tragic loss of life in Salisbury earlier this year. Sweden welcomes the Technical Assistance Visit report issued by the Technical Secretariat, which confirms the conclusions of the United Kingdom authorities that Ms Burgess and her partner were exposed to the same chemical agent that was used against the Skripals. We would also like to thank the United Kingdom for the transparency that it continues to show with regard to this sordid matter. We have every confidence in the findings of the United Kingdom investigation that the Russian security services were behind the attempt on Sergei Skripal's life.

The latest events regarding the Salisbury case illustrate the important challenges that this Organisation is facing. For one thing, we must take action to ensure that impunity for chemical weapons use no longer is tolerated. And while Sweden would have preferred to see that a new independent mechanism could be established by the UN Security Council, we welcome the decision of the Special Session in June to task the OPCW with attribution for



chemical weapons use in Syria. This matter was too important to be allowed to be blocked indefinitely. Now that the decision has been duly adopted in accordance with the rules of procedures of Convention, we must unite as States Parties to enable the implementation of the Technical Secretariat's new responsibilities. And this also entails agreeing on a way to provide for the necessary financial resources.

Madam Chairperson,

In Syria, we have witnessed repeated use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime and also by Da'esh, as confirmed by the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism. Sweden, therefore, shared the concerns of many about the recent allegations of impending use of chemical weapons in Idlib in Syria. Our fears were reinforced by recent reports of the Fact-Finding Missions about the continued use of both sarin and chlorine gas in connection with hostilities there in 2017 and 2018. For now, a large-scale military offensive against Idlib seems to have been averted. It is of utmost importance that the ceasefire holds so that a new humanitarian catastrophe can be avoided.

With regard to the OPCW's verification work in Syria, we call on the Syrian side to cooperate fully and proactively with the Declaration Assessment Team, so that the OPCW may be in a position, ultimately, to verify the veracity and completeness of its chemical weapons reports.

Madam Chairperson,

We will have precious little time to consider the important proposals and options papers that the Director-General was tasked to produce for the next regular session of the Conference of States Parties and the Fourth Review Conference. I would call on all States Parties to be constructive, innovative, and to find the unity necessary to make progress during the important weeks ahead.

To inform States Parties consideration on assistance related to chemical terrorism, Sweden has commissioned a study by the Verification Research, Training and Information Centre (VERTIC) into the relevance of elements of the IAEA Nuclear Security Programme of Activities to the ongoing efforts to strengthen the OPCW's assistance to States Parties. We aim to organise a side event on this topic next month.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate my delegation's call for adopting a gender perspective to the work of the OPCW. This also entails making real efforts to improve the gender balance among senior positions in the Technical Secretariat. I welcome the intervention by Canada in this regard and look forward to working together with you Mr Director-General to apply a gender lens to the work of this organisation.

I would request that this statement be issued as an official document of this session of the Executive Council and be placed on the public website.

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.