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SWITZERLAND

**STATEMENT BY H.E. HEINZ WALKER-NEDERKOORN PERMANENT
REPRESENTATIVE OF SWITZERLAND TO THE OPCW AT THE FOURTH SPECIAL
SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES TO REVIEW
THE CHEMICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION**

Mr Chairperson,

Let me begin by congratulating you on your election as Chairperson of the Fourth Review Conference of the Chemical Weapons Convention. I would like to thank you, as well as Ambassador Puja as Chairperson of the Open-Ended Working Group, for your tireless efforts in preparing this Conference.

For the past six years, the ban on chemical weapons has been undermined by their repeated use – be it in Syria and Iraq as a method of warfare, or in Malaysia and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in the context of criminal acts. In light of these developments, we urge all States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention to live up to their responsibility to safeguard the international norm against the use of chemical weapons. Let us seize the opportunity of this important conference to send the unequivocal signal that violations of the prohibition of chemical weapons will not be tolerated under any circumstances, that alleged violations will be thoroughly investigated, and appropriate measures be taken to ensure compliance with the Convention.

The repeated use of chemical weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic and the self-proclaimed group “Islamic State”, as confirmed by the Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) in 2016 and 2017 after thorough, impartial, and professional investigations is an unprecedented violation of the norm. It may in many cases constitute a war crime that must be prosecuted. In this regard, Switzerland supports calls for cooperation and information sharing between the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and relevant investigative mechanisms, including the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM). There can be no impunity for such crimes.

Likewise, the use of a nerve agent of the so-called Novichok class in the United Kingdom is illegal, reprehensible, and extremely worrying. Switzerland has full confidence in the investigation of the British authorities and the credible results derived from the OPCW technical assistance visits.



The Organisation is at a crossroad and we need to set clear objectives in order to ensure it remains fit for purpose. Concrete measures are necessary to deter and end the use of chemical weapons and hold those responsible to account. My country supported the decision of the Fourth Special Session of the Conference of States Parties to establish arrangements within the OPCW that – on the basis of technical evidence – serve to identify the origin of chemical weapons used in Syria as well as the parties responsible. In line with the assessment of the OPCW's legal advisor, Switzerland has absolutely no doubt regarding the legality and legitimacy of this decision that was based on established rules and procedures stipulated by the Convention. Furthermore, we thank the Director-General (DG) and the Technical Secretariat for the proposals submitted at the Twenty-Third Session of the Conference of the States Parties regarding the implementation of paragraphs 19, 20, and 21 of the same decision. It is essential that the decision now be implemented fully and effectively. The adoption of the budget constitutes an important milestone in this regard.

In light of the near complete destruction of all declared chemical weapons, the prevention of the re-emergence of chemical weapons is at the heart of the future of this Organisation. We reiterate our conviction that it is necessary to launch a discussion on Central Nervous System-acting Chemicals (CNSaCs). Switzerland and an increasing number of States Parties fear that the silence surrounding the use of toxic chemicals for law enforcement purposes other than riot control agents risk undermining the object and purpose of the Convention.

This Conference provides the perfect opportunity to address the issue and initiate a comprehensive and focused debate within the policy-making organs on CNSaCs for law enforcement purposes, and their possible status under the Convention, with the aim of creating more confidence among States Parties. To this end, my delegation, together with Australia, has proposed language for this Conference's final document.

I wish to reiterate my Government's full confidence in, and support for, the work of the OPCW, which has consistently conducted its missions in a professional, impartial manner and in full respect of its mandate. Its contributions have clearly demonstrated the importance of the Organisation's verification regime and investigative know-how, which, in light of the repeated use of chemical weapons in recent years, must be kept up to date and further strengthened. To this end, Switzerland submitted a Working Paper (RC-4/WP.9) to this Conference on strengthening the OPCW's verification regime. Let me highlight the following elements.

First, the relevance and credibility of the Chemical Weapons Convention as a key disarmament and non-proliferation instrument depends on its ability to stay abreast of the rapid advances in the scientific and technological realm. Switzerland highly appreciates the valuable work of the Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) and will continue to support this important body. Please join us this Friday, 23 November, from 1 to 3 pm in the Europe room, for the Side Event "Science for Diplomats" that Switzerland and the OPCW are co-organising on the topic of "Convergence and Solving Chemical Mysteries".

Secondly, the OPCW Laboratory performs key functions and is of pivotal importance for the effectiveness and integrity of the verification regime. Switzerland acknowledges the ever-growing tasks of the OPCW Laboratory and endorses its upgrade into a Centre for Chemistry and Technology.

Thirdly, the network of designated laboratories and the OPCW Laboratory maintain the gold standard in detecting and identifying chemical warfare agents. Switzerland rejects and condemns any attempts to undermine or discredit their credibility, integrity and technical competence. In order to strengthen the verification regime and the norm against chemical weapons, the network needs to be expanded – especially into regions with no designated laboratories.

Fourthly, Switzerland has repeatedly stressed the importance of sampling and analysis as a key verification tool. In this regard, the OPCW Central Analytical Database (OCAD) plays a crucial role and should be steadily expanded based on technical considerations. The OCAD should also include data on chemicals such as central nervous system-acting chemicals and so-called “Novichoks” that could be encountered during on-site inspections. Switzerland also supports the technical proposal to update the Annex on Chemicals of the Convention, in accordance with paragraph 5 of Article XV of the Convention submitted by Canada, the Netherlands, and the United States of America.

Fifthly, in order to execute any verification activities, challenge inspections or investigations of alleged use with a high degree of competence, the OPCW must be supported in order to maintain and further develop the necessary technical capacity and expertise.

Sixthly, we commend the Technical Secretariat for their work under Article X by providing expert advice and training to States Parties wishing to build their own capabilities for the protection against chemical weapons. Switzerland also welcomes the establishment of the Rapid Response and Assistance Mission as an additional tool in the hands of the Director-General to provide emergency assistance in the case of a chemical weapons attack.

Finally, the OPCW needs to have sufficient flexibility to retain the expertise and knowledge to perform its mandate effectively. We therefore support the review of the tenure policy. Geographic and gender representation within the Technical Secretariat must also be improved. As the co-chair of the International Gender Champions Den Haag Hub, Switzerland welcomes the Director-General’s commitments as a Gender Champion to mainstream gender equality in the OPCW.

Before I conclude, my delegation wishes to put on record our concern about the accreditation process for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to attend this Review Conference. The refusal to accredit NGOs based purely on the anonymous objections of a small number of States Parties is unacceptable. NGOs play an important role in addressing current and future challenges and achieving our common goal of a world free of chemical weapons.

The opportunity to take stock of past achievements and set the future priorities for the OPCW only arises every five years. In order to strengthen the Convention and further its implementation, we need to make progress on a number of issues in the coming days. Mr Chairperson, rest assured of my delegation’s full cooperation in the negotiations that are ahead of us.

RC-4/NAT.15

page 4

Thank you.

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