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**UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR KENNETH D. WARD  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
TO THE OPCW AT THE NINETIETH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Madam Chairperson,  
Mr Director-General,  
Distinguished Ambassadors and Delegates,

The horrendous use of chemical weapons is no longer consigned to the distant past and our calendars are now littered with all too many grim, and all too recent, anniversaries. On 4 April, we recall the brutal attack by the Assad Regime on the town of Khan Shaykhun where nearly a hundred people were killed. On 21 August, the nearly 1,500 dead from the Syrian sarin attack in Ghouta must again be mourned. On 7 April, we must remember those killed in a chemical attack in Douma, the horrific details of which are highlighted in the most recent FFM report. These dates should be a reminder to all of us that Syria has used chemical weapons against its own people in many, many more attacks. A week ago on 4 March we also marked the first anniversary of Russia's attempted assassination of a former Russian spy, Sergei Skripal, using a Novichok nerve agent.

In response to this wave of chemical attacks, responsible members of this Executive Council ("the Council") and of the Conference of the States Parties ("the Conference") have taken decisive actions to defend the Chemical Weapons Convention ("the Convention"). Last June, at the special session of the Conference, responsible States Parties empowered the Technical Secretariat ("the Secretariat") to put in place additional tools to respond to chemical weapons use, including investigating their use, both in Syria and globally, and unmasking the perpetrators, which is a critical step in seeking accountability.

The Annex on Chemicals has not been updated since the Convention entered into force, more than twenty years ago. The drafters of the Convention acknowledged that the chemical weapons threat environment could change and provided a process for adding chemicals to the three schedules. The Novichok nerve agent used in Salisbury – and all of its close chemical cousins – constitute a serious threat, which must be addressed. On 14 January, the Council took the critical first step in its consensus recommendation to all States Parties that the joint proposal submitted by Canada, the Netherlands, and the United States be adopted. We strongly urge all States Parties to support, without delay, the incorporation of these two families of chemicals into Schedule 1A.

The United States welcomes the progress that has been made by the Secretariat, in implementing the June Special Conference decision. Under the able leadership of



Ambassador Santiago Onate, the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) will soon begin its efforts to identify the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons in Syria. There are a host of FFM findings of chemical weapons use from 2017 and 2018, involving sarin and chlorine, which need to be addressed by the IIT. We hope that by this fall the IIT will be able to report its attribution findings on at least some of these incidents.

At its recent briefing to States Parties, the Secretariat indicated that, after a lengthy hiatus, the OPCW Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) will re-engage Syria on the declaration of its chemical weapons programme. The United States supports these efforts, but the Secretariat must be highly circumspect and prudent in its dealings with the Assad regime. The sordid history of OPCW engagement with Syria regarding its declaration does not bode well for the future talks; indeed, it is a cautionary tale of defiant non-compliance by a State Party.

In the special session held in June 2018, the Conference expressed its concern that the confirmed use of chemical weapons by Syria, by direct implication, establishes that Syria failed to declare and destroy its entire chemical weapons stockpile. Further, the Conference demanded that Syria declare all of the chemical weapons it possesses, including sarin and its precursors. In light of the decision of the Conference, the DAT must take into account Syria's confirmed use of chemical weapons in assessing the truthfulness of Syrian authorities and the accuracy and completeness of Syria's declaration.

It is also necessary to highlight the very unfortunate situation surrounding the Advisory Body on Administrative and Financial Matters, known as the ABAF. In March 2018, the OPCW Council approved the appointment of a Russian diplomat, Vladimir Kuznetsov, as a member of the ABAF. Since that time, it was brought to our attention that the same Mr Kuznetsov engaged in money laundering during his tenure at the United Nations Oil-for-Food Program, for which he was convicted in U.S. federal court. Mr Kuznetsov's conviction for conspiracy to commit money laundering for activities he engaged in while working with another international organisation should have been disclosed to members of the Council at the time of his nomination and should disqualify him from serving on the ABAF. The integrity and reputation of the OPCW must be protected. Through you, Madam Chairperson, the United States and like-minded states continue to invite the Russian Federation to propose an alternative candidate to replace Mr Kuznetsov. As the United States continues to seek the replacement of Mr Kuznetsov, we will also seek reform of the ABAF related to the nomination, conduct, and dismissal of ABAF members. Other OPCW bodies have similar provisions, and the ABAF should as well.

The United States continues its efforts to eliminate the remainder of our chemical weapons stockpile. In April, pursuant to the decision taken at the Sixteenth Conference, we will host a visit for representatives of the Council to our destruction facility in Pueblo, Colorado – one of the two remaining destruction sites. Destruction operations have been underway at the Pueblo site for over two years. In 2017, we hosted a Council visit to our facility in Blue Grass, Kentucky.

The United States strongly supports the Director-General's effort to upgrade the OPCW laboratory through the construction of a new facility. We commend the Netherlands for its generous donation of a site for the laboratory. The United States is pleased to announce today that we will be joining other "Friends of the Lab" who have made voluntary financial contributions. To ensure the timely success of this important initiative, the United States pledges to donate 7 million U.S. dollars over two years. When complete, the new OPCW

laboratory will be a critical part of the OPCW community and network of laboratories, ready to support all member states.

Concerning the situation in Venezuela, President Trump officially recognised Juan Guaidó as the Interim President of Venezuela on 23 January 2019. The United States stands with 54 nations in this recognition of Guaidó's assumption of the presidency, per the Venezuelan constitution. The United States calls on all responsible nations to recognise Interim President Guaidó immediately, and on the Venezuelan military and security forces to accept the peaceful and democratic transfer of power. The United States will not tolerate those who seek to undermine Venezuela's democratic institutions and loot Venezuelan resources to enrich themselves at the expense of the Venezuelan people. Large-scale protests across Venezuela against Maduro demonstrate clearly that the people of Venezuela are fed up with autocracy, human rights violations, widespread poverty, lack of basic food and medicine, and economic mismanagement. Maduro's callous use of the military, police, and criminal gangs to block badly needed international humanitarian aid from entering Venezuela demonstrates the brutality of Maduro and his cronies

In closing, I wish to address the continuing political divide both here in this Council and within the Conference. In recent months, a number of delegations have called for a return to the climate of consensus, which prevailed at the OPCW for many years. For some, this sentiment springs from a certain diplomatic fatigue; others lament that this divide has deprived assistance and cooperation issues of the attention they deserve. Still others, however, are eager to use consensus to render inert the OPCW and its policy-making organs so as to accommodate and advance their own geopolitical interests.

To be sure, consensus can either be a good thing, or a bad thing, depending upon the diplomatic context. What is the context that we face here today? There are three States Parties to the Convention that are in violation of their obligations – Russia, Syria, and Iran – and two of these States Parties are known to have used chemical weapons. The third State Party is the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism. It remains the most significant challenge to Middle East stability. Iran and Russia also repeatedly work to protect Syria from international censure for the Assad regime's horrific use of chemical weapons. Joining in any consensus that would help these States Parties continue to possess, use, and paper-over their violations of the Convention would not be a cure for what ails us; rather, it would curse the world to relive the era of chemical weapons. An era that the Convention sought to leave behind.

The political divide in this room should be a sobering reminder to all responsible States Parties of what is at stake. Joining consensus on terms dictated by Russia, Syria, and Iran would be a betrayal of the Convention and an insult to all victims of chemical weapons use. The only consensus worth having is one that remains true to the Convention and the commitment it embodies to achieving a world free of chemical weapons. Let me say that again, the only consensus worth having is one that remains true to the Convention and the commitment it embodies to achieving a world free of chemical weapons.

Finally, The United States would like to take this opportunity to associate itself with the Lima Group Statement regarding the situation in Venezuela.

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.

I ask that this statement be designated an official document of this Executive Council Session and posted on both the external server and the public website.

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