



STATEMENT DELIVERED ON BEHALF OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA ON
THE OCCASION OF THE GENERAL DEBATE OF THE NINETY-FIRST SESSION OF
THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL OF THE OPCW (EC-91)
THE HAGUE, 9-12 JULY

Chairperson,

Director General Fernando Arias,

Senior members of the Technical Secretariat,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates

1. Allow me to first take this opportunity to welcome Ambassador Andrea Perugini, the Permanent Representative of Italy, as Chairperson of this Session of the Executive Council. Your steadfast and calm leadership will be indispensable for the success of the meeting and to ensure a successful outcome thereof. In this regard, you can reckon on my delegation's cooperation and support.
2. My delegation associates itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention that are Member States of the Non-Aligned Movement and China, by Her Excellency Haifa Aisami Madah, Permanent Representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, as well as with the statement delivered on behalf of the African Group of States Parties by His Excellency Ambassador Kamal Bashir Ahmed, Permanent Representative of The Sudan.

3. As before, my delegation would like to express its gratitude to the Director-General, HE Ambassador Fernando Arias, for his informative and comprehensive statement delivered at the beginning of this 91st Session of the regular Executive Council. We would like to congratulate you for your continued and tireless efforts to lead this organisation, and pledge our full support and cooperation as you steer this world-acclaimed organisation in fulfilling its mandate of maintaining global peace and security, by ridding the world of chemical weapons through verifiable means and in a manner that ensures they will not re-emerge. After all, the Organisation and its success belong to us all.

Chairperson,

4. As we have often stated before, but cannot over-emphasize, no cause can ever justify the use of any weapon of mass destruction. South Africa therefore opposes any use of chemical weapons and is fully committed to its international obligations as a State Party to the Chemical Weapons Convention. The use of chemical weapons anywhere, by anyone and in any circumstances, undermines the international norm against the production, use and stockpiling of chemical weapons established under the CWC. Therefore, it remains imperative that those few States that continue to remain outside the Convention should become parties thereto and South Africa calls on them to do so without further delay. This is especially important with respect to those non-States Parties that find themselves in regions that are affected by conflict.
5. My delegation welcomes the Director General's report on the progress made on the elimination of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic.
6. We emphasize that successful cooperation between the OPCW and the Syrian Arab Republic is the only way in which to resolve other outstanding issues in a transparent and professional manner. Where contentious issues may arise, we trust that they may be amicably resolved.

7. Bearing in mind the objective of the Convention of ensuring the destruction of all chemical weapons with a view to eliminating their threat to international peace and security, we welcome the further progress achieved in this regard.

Chairperson,

8. We meet against the background of the unfortunate reality that our recent meetings have continued to be overshadowed by divergent geopolitical interests and the pursuit of national interests rather than the interest of collective security. A direct consequence was that we were unable to adopt a final report at the Fourth Review Conference last year. Consensus, a pillar on which this organization has always been built, seems to be slipping farther and farther away; our deliberations in the Policy-Making Organs are now characterised by the taking of critical global security decisions through a vote. You will recall that as a step towards breaking this impasse, the NAM CWC States Parties and China proposed the establishment of an Open-Ended Working Group to identify those elements contained in the Chairperson's Report that reached consensus and to determine the prioritization of the implementation of such issues. A specific proposal for a draft decision on the establishment of an Open-Ended Working Group to be submitted to this Session was communicated by Venezuela as the Chair of this Group to the Co-facilitators for this process.
9. We wish to express our appreciation to the Co-facilitators of this process, His Excellency Ambassador Agustin Vasquez Gomez of El Salvador and His Excellency Ambassador Gusti Agung Wesaka Puja of Indonesia, on the wide consultations that they have since undertaken in order to move this matter forward. We have taken note of their proposal on this issue, as well as the positions expressed by States Parties during two meetings last week. We reiterate that the NAM&China proposal must be treated as a serious attempt to galvanise consensus on as many issues as possible in order to allow for progress with respect to the stated goal of the Convention to achieve a chemical-weapons free world.

Chairperson,

10. A journey of a thousand miles starts with one small step; let us not fear to take a bold step forward. We therefore call on all delegations to engage on this matter with a view of achieving such consensus at the earliest opportunity.
11. We also welcome the non-Paper on ensuring a diverse and qualified workforce of the Technical Secretariat. It appears that positive developments have taken place with respect to improving the gender balance of the Organisation at all staff levels, and also note the steps envisaged in order to ensure the equitable geographic distribution of staff. In this respect, we would welcome more information on the geographical distribution of the present staff component, as a point of departure for the initiatives that must now follow, also to address the low percentage of staff from African States Parties employed by the Organisation. We emphasise that the human resource policies of the Organisation should always be fair and transparent. As before, South Africa will actively engage with a view to find a way forward in addressing the challenges with respect to diversity in the workforce, and ensuring that the Technical Secretariat is staffed by capable and professional people in order to address the challenges faced by the organization.

Chairperson,

12. Strengthening cooperation with African States Parties remains of critical importance and we welcome all initiatives in this regard. In this regard, we especially commend the convening of the 17th Regional Meeting of National Authorities in Addis Ababa in June 2019, which reviewed the implementation of the Fourth Phase of the Africa Programme and considered the design of its Fifth Phase, while South Africa is proud to have been the host of an Analytical Chemistry Course held under the Africa Programme at Protechnik Laboratories in Pretoria in May 2019 in which chemistry professionals from industry, government and academia from African and other States Parties participated.

Furthermore, we appreciate the efforts of the Technical Secretariat in assisting States Parties to enhance their national implementation measures.

In conclusion, Chairperson,

13. Multilateralism and the rule of international law are cornerstones of South Africa's foreign policy. For South Africa therefore, the non-discriminatory and consistent application of the provisions of relevant multilateral instruments and the preservation of the international norm against weapons of mass destruction, including chemical weapons, are principles of fundamental importance. My delegation will therefore continue to work towards preventing any politicisation of the relevant multilateral instruments, whilst at the same time holding States Parties accountable for any non-compliance with their obligations, based on incontrovertible evidence.

Chairperson,

In closing I would like to request that this statement be regarded as the official statement of this session.

I thank you.