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**SWITZERLAND**

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR HEINZ WALKER-NEDERKOORN  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF SWITZERLAND TO THE OPCW AT THE  
TWENTY-FOURTH SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES**

Mr Chairperson,

Allow me to join previous speakers in expressing my congratulations for your election as Chairperson of the Twenty-Fourth Session of the Conference of the States Parties (“the Conference”). You can count on my delegation’s full support and cooperation.

Chemical weapons represent a serious threat to international and human security. It is essential that the universal prohibition of these weapons is upheld and that all States that have not yet done so accede as soon as possible to the Chemical Weapons Convention (“the Convention”). It is also fundamental that all States Parties abide by the rules and fully comply with the provisions of the Convention.

For the past seven years, the prohibition of chemical weapons has been challenged by their repeated use in Syria and elsewhere. Switzerland condemns in the strongest possible terms any use of chemical weapons by any actor and underlines once again that their use is prohibited under all circumstances. Concrete measures are necessary to deter and end the use of chemical weapons and hold those responsible to account.

The Swiss Government supported the establishment of a mechanism within the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) that serves to identify the origin of the use of chemical weapons well as the parties responsible for it. We welcome the progress achieved in setting up the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT). Switzerland stands fully behind the IIT’s mandate and has absolutely no doubt about its legality and legitimacy. We expressed our support by making a voluntary financial contribution to the IIT earlier this year. Likewise, we financially support the lessons-learned process of the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM). Furthermore, we have the intention to make additional voluntary financial contributions to both the Trust Fund for Syria Missions and the upgrade of the OPCW Laboratory to a new Centre for Chemistry and Technology.

I wish to reiterate Switzerland’s full confidence in the work and findings of the Technical Secretariat, which has consistently conducted its missions in the context of the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM), the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT), and the JIM in a professional and impartial way, and in full respect of its mandate. In order to ensure the OPCW’s effectiveness, we must continue to support it both politically and financially. This is why my Government fully endorses the Programme and Budget for 2020.



The Convention must remain relevant in an evolving context and in light of technological advances. In this regard, I would like to highlight the following elements.

First, Switzerland supports the listing of new kinds of nerve agents of the so-called “Novichok-family” in the Schedules of Chemicals of the Convention, following their reprehensible use in the United Kingdom. We are glad that both the joint proposal of Canada, the Netherlands, and the United States and the Russian proposal could be drafted in a way that is acceptable to all States Parties.

Second, the relevance and credibility of the 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. To address these challenges, Switzerland will convene a fourth workshop in September 2020 to discuss the convergence of chemistry and biology and how advances in science and technology affect the Convention.

Third, the OPCW needs to have sufficient flexibility to retain the expertise and knowledge to perform its mandate effectively. We therefore support the decision that allows the Organisation to re-hire inspectors.

Switzerland is convinced that addressing the issue of the aerosolised use of central nervous system-acting chemicals for law enforcement purposes is necessary in order to safeguard the integrity of the Convention and prevent the weakening of the global norm against the use of toxic chemicals for purposes prohibited under the Convention. An increasing number of States Parties, the scientific community and civil society fear that continued inaction on this important issue risks undermining the object and purpose of the Convention.

Therefore, Australia, Switzerland, and the United States have initiated a process with the aim of working towards two decisions that reflect our concerns being considered in 2020 by the Executive Council and the Conference of the States Parties, respectively. The decisions reaffirm our understanding of the application of the Convention—namely, that the aerosolised use of central nervous system-acting chemicals is inconsistent with law enforcement purposes as a “purpose not prohibited”. These decisions do not create new legal obligations for States Parties or impose any restrictions on legitimate medical uses. Over 20 countries have already joined us as co-sponsors and we call on all States Parties to support us in our endeavour.

Before I conclude, my delegation wishes to put on record our concern about the accreditation process for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to attend this Conference. The refusal to accredit NGOs, whose activities are demonstrably relevant to the object and purpose of the Convention, 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.

Thank you.