

RUSSIAN FEDERATION

**STATEMENT BY MR. O.N.RYAZANTSEV
HEAD OF THE DELEGATION OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION
AT THE TWENTY-FOURTH SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF
THE STATES PARTIES TO THE CHEMICAL WEAPONS
CONVENTION
(The Hague, November 25, 2019)**

Mr. Chairperson, Mr. Director-General, distinguished delegates,

First and foremost, Mr. Chairperson, allow me to congratulate you on behalf of the delegation of the Russian Federation on your election to such a responsible position and express our confidence that under your leadership the 24th session of the Conference of the States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction will be held in an atmosphere of mutual understanding, fairness and constructive engagement, and the decisions will be adopted in a spirit of political tolerance and based on consensus. The Russian delegation will endeavour to offer you the most active assistance.

Mr. Chairperson,

The Chemical Weapons Convention remains one of the most important elements of the international system for disarmament and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction for the third decade running. It seeks to address two key challenges: to eliminate an entire class of such weapons and to create strong barriers to impede the manufacture, use and proliferation of chemical weapons. However, those challenges can only be tackled if the Convention has a comprehensive and universal scope, which has not yet been achieved. In this regard, we welcome the first conference on the establishment of a Middle East WMD-free zone held in New York last week considering it an important

practical step towards elaborating a legally binding treaty that would contribute to the full universalization of the CWC. It is important that a representative of our Organization participated in this process as well.

Total destruction of all declared chemical weapons remains a pending issue, since one State Party is yet to fully honour its obligations. We encourage this State to make additional efforts to eliminate its arsenal as soon as possible.

The current situation at the OPCW is a matter of great concern. The continuing division within the Organization due to the politicization of its activities and imposition of the issues that are beyond the legal scope of the Convention, the dilution of the OPCW mandate, the departure from the consensus practice and the adoption of illegitimate decisions by vote undermine the effective implementation of the goals and objectives of the Convention and gravely compromise the reputation of the Organization as an independent expert body on chemical weapons.

A key element splitting the Organization is obviously the "attribution". The decision to vest the OPCW Technical Secretariat with functions to identify parties responsible for the use of chemical weapons adopted in June 2018 at the CSP-SS-4 in contradiction of the Convention is illegitimate. This innovation forced on the OPCW goes beyond the scope of the CWC and the Organization, the decision itself was adopted in violation of the Convention, and its implementation is nothing other than an interference with the exclusive competence of the UN Security Council.

As a clearly foreseeable result of this questionable decision, fundamental problems with its realization ensued, namely, the lack of transparency and accountability of the "attribution" mechanism, which is the Investigation and Identification Team, to the OPCW governing bodies. The States Parties have yet to learn about the terms of reference of this entity, its operating conditions, its criteria for selection of "incidents" to investigate or sources and modalities of its financing.

We strongly oppose the allocation of funds for the attribution novelties of the Technical Secretariat. We find it unacceptable to conceal the amounts of funding for the attribution mechanism from the Member States, and such expenditures are intentionally hidden in various budget lines. We regret that in this case as well, a number of Member States are trying to secure their interests through the so-called omnibus draft decision on the programme and budget disregarding the views of other delegations. Russia opposes the extension of the operation of the Special Fund for IT Infrastructure, which is planned to be financed from the 2016 cash surplus. We will not tolerate the distribution of cash surpluses for return to the Member States without our consent. In this regard, we reiterate that the funding of the Special Fund for IT Infrastructure from the cash surplus owed to us is unacceptable and request the Technical Secretariat to take this amount into account when estimating our regular contribution to the 2020 budget. I would like to emphasize that our position is not to deprive the Organization of its budget, but only to call for budgeting in full compliance with the financial rules of the OPCW and other international organizations. We note that if funds for the operation of this structure will be allocated from "voluntary contributions", in essence, this will mean only one thing – the recruitment of representatives of the OPCW's Technical Secretariat by sponsors to prepare "made-to-order" reports. Unfortunately, all this once again confirms that implementation of this geopolitical "project" does not benefit the OPCW.

The signing of a memorandum with the so-called Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation in Syria operating in Geneva, in violation of the provisions of the CWC, also raises questions. In fact, it has created a channel for sensitive data leakage from the Organization in violation of its Policy on Confidentiality. The Attribution Team, bypassing existing norms, is attempting to gain access to the New York archives of the defunct OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism established by the UN

Security Council. The Russian Federation will be forced to take measures to protect confidential information.

Mr. Chairperson,

It is well known that the undertaking with the attribution mechanism was initiated to exert pressure on Damascus. That is what all the latest reports of the Fact-Finding Mission in Syria (FFM) are aimed at. However, a number of the Mission's investigations, including the latest one concerning the high-profile incident of April 7, 2018, in Douma convince us that the findings of the special Mission cannot be trusted blindly.

The released report on Douma is essentially a distorted image of reality. As it became widely known, the conclusions of some of the Mission's specialists confirming the reliability of the information provided by the Syrian government and the Russian military were ignored, and the report was based on the opinion of some outsiders. Does this reflect the high level of professionalism and impartiality of the OPCW expert team, which is so exalted by some countries, or something else entirely?

All attempts to understand and restore the true state of affairs are blocked and "drowned" in pseudo-legal sophisms. We were groundlessly denied a private briefing at the OPCW with the participation of all the experts without exception who, at one stage or another, were involved in the investigation of the events in Douma. We reiterate our demand.

Our request that the States Parties be familiarized with the ballistic analyses by some three "independent experts", which formed the basis for the OPCW Technical Secretariat's conclusion that, in Douma, chlorine was allegedly delivered by means of an aircraft, was not satisfied under contrived pretexts. We get a strong impression that everything possible is being done to deny us the truth.

We would also like to draw attention to the fact that the FFM findings regarding the Douma incident are questioned by a number of truly independent

specialists. Thus, in October 2019 in Brussels, the Courage Foundation NGO convened a meeting of internationally recognized experts in the fields of non-proliferation and disarmament, whose professionalism and objectiveness are beyond all doubt to examine this, so to speak, investigation. The participants in the meeting concluded that the FFM investigation was conducted with grave violations of the OPCW principles and guidance documents and called on the Technical Secretariat to take a number of relevant steps to restore the good name and credibility of the Organization. This statement is publicly available online and can be accessed by anyone interested.

Mr. Chairperson,

We are convinced that a fundamental reform of the Syrian mission as well as an adjustment of its terms of reference, which appear outdated in the present circumstances, are long overdue. It is obvious that, in order to conduct quality investigations, the Technical Secretariat experts should personally visit the sites of alleged chemical incidents and collect evidence in accordance with the chain-of-custody procedure. Besides, measures should be taken with regard to the mission staffing as it is mostly comprised of specialists from countries where anti-Syrian sentiments prevail.

The Syrian government regularly submits information to the Technical Secretariat on the activities carried out in its territory by terrorist and extremist groups that have access to toxic chemicals. The OPCW simply ignores this information. We need to start making use of the Organization's potential anti-terrorist capability and think about concrete measures to address the challenges and threats of chemical terrorism — not only in Syria and the Middle East but also beyond the region.

We believe that the identified problems can easily be dealt with if the OPCW Members show the necessary political will. We once again call for restoring the unity of the Organization and getting back to work based on the principles of consensus.

Mr. Chairperson,

In the course of our work, we will be approving two draft decisions on amending the Annex on Chemicals, one drawn up by Russia and the other – by the United States, Canada, and the Netherlands. The Russian side and its western partners have put in a lot of work, and we are close to its successful conclusion. We expect that both proposals will receive consensus support.

We also note with satisfaction the initiative by the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and China on the creation of a discussion platform to consider the issues on which consensus could be achieved. We support this constructive idea and hope all the necessary decisions will be taken.

It is high time to get on with the task of implementing Article XI of the CWC, which provides for building broad international cooperation in chemical industry. Promotion of relevant economic and technological development must at last become an imperative.

On a final note, I would like to assure you, Mr. Chairperson, that the Russian delegation is ready for constructive work, and you can fully count on our support.

As for specific agenda items, the Russian delegation will share its views in due course during the session.

I thank you, Mr. Chairperson, and kindly request that this statement be circulated as an official document of the 24th session of the Conference.