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PANAMA

**STATEMENT BY MRS ARMONÍA CHANG DE BELCHIEUR
ACTING CHARGÉ D'AFFAIRES OF THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATION OF THE
REPUBLIC OF PANAMA TO THE OPCW AT THE TWENTY-FOURTH SESSION
OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES**

Mr Chairperson, Mr Director-General, distinguished delegates,

I would like to congratulate the Chairperson, H.E. Ambassador Krassimir Kostov, on his election, and I wish him every success and voice our full support. I would also like to express our respect for the Director-General, the Vice-Chairs, the Chairperson of the Executive Council here today, the members of the Bureau, and all delegates.

I also welcome H.E. Mr Yun-young Lee, Ambassador of the Republic of Korea, who brought a successful conclusion to his chairmanship of the Twenty-Third Session of the Conference, and whom Panama was proud to support in its capacity as Vice-Chairperson representing the Group of Latin American and Caribbean Countries.

Each year, as we hold this Conference, it is necessary to remain conscious of the fact that we have before ourselves a new opportunity to reflect on everything that we have been able to build thanks to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction.

It has been more than two decades of continuous work and arduous tasks to find common ground, with a trajectory that has allowed the majority of States Parties to come together under the same multilateral instrument like no other convention.

It is of historical importance that we are part of the first multilateral treaty aimed at eliminating a specific class of weapons of mass destruction, and the implementation of a highly specialised regime of inspection and verification in the service of chemical disarmament and non-proliferation, demonstrating that none of this time has passed in vain.

It has led to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons being awarded with the Nobel Peace Prize.

International peace and security are truly what bring us here, because the Republic of Panama is convinced that peaceful coexistence within the international community demands strict compliance with the Convention, as well as taking the necessary decisions in an effort to achieve a world free of chemical weapons.

Panama does not have the slightest doubt that—as has been voiced by our highest authorities in their statement at the most recent General Assembly of the United Nations—and I quote:



“global problems demand multilateral solutions”, which is why as a country, we believe that we will only find these solutions if we act collectively: there is no other way out.

For this reason, together with the trust placed in the Director-General of the OPCW, H.E. Mr Fernando Arias, and in recognition of the work of the technical teams of the Organisation, we call upon the Technical Secretariat to continue carrying out its tasks impartially, transparently, and professionally, and to continue with the activities within the Structured Dialogue in order to address outstanding matters. We welcome your full opening statement, Mr Director-General.

Although there have been positive results, it is also imperative to renew our commitment through greater efforts to tackle the challenges that reality holds for us, such as allegations of the use of chemical weapons and a complex international area that is undergoing constant change.

We recall just how necessary prevention is in countering constant threats. Fostering knowledge of the peaceful use of chemistry will put into place solid conditions for the youth of today and future generations, so that they will be able to understand that advances in science and technology do not necessarily mean the irrational and prohibited use of chemical substances.

International cooperation is also important within the context of the OPCW and should involve all stakeholders in an effort to apply scientific knowledge in favour of the principles of use that is strictly in line with what is permissible, as we expect to see with the transformation of the OPCW Laboratory into the Centre for Chemistry and Technology.

With regard to the OPCW’s human resources, we call for visualising the key role and boosting the participation of women and their empowerment in this matter, which will in turn also enrich geographic distribution.

The work of the subsidiary bodies, such as the Advisory Body for Education and Outreach and the Scientific Advisory Board should help to crystallise part of the tasks related to cooperation that the States Parties require, particularly those set by the National Authorities.

We are all familiar with the different levels of needs of the National Authorities with regard to strengthening national capacities, assistance and protection, and national legislation, to name a few; attending to these needs is crucial in order to make progress on common goals, such as expanding the network of designated laboratories in the Latin American and Caribbean region.

Panama’s commitment to the cooperation programmes is firm; in March 2020, a basic course will be held for the countries in our region on responding to chemical attacks and incidents involving toxic industrial chemicals. We also expect that new areas in technical training could soon be considered.

Panama is aware of the importance of ensuring that the Organisation has an appropriate budget in place, but this must be in accordance with internal and international economic realities. For this reason, transitioning the budget to a biennial methodology will allow for broader projection, and fundamentally more effective and efficient use of resources.

It is to this future that we look with optimism, knowing that the Organisation has challenges ahead, urging us to maintain the best possible budgetary management and planning system for human resources that will be able to meet those challenges.

Panama, as a Vice-Chair of the past Conference and as a member of the Executive Council, has borne witness to the fact that tireless work has been carried out and dialogue has been used as a tool exhaustively to address matters in favour of strengthening the Convention, demonstrating that there is still room for agreement and understanding.

We must now demonstrate the commitment to reaching other milestones on matters that the States Parties must confront. Yes, these matters are extensive and diverse—and all equally important.

Panama reaffirms that the only thing that is not negotiable is the use of chemicals as weapons, and vehemently reiterates its condemnation of such use by anyone, anywhere, and under any circumstance.

We have the organisational architecture to confront the challenges concerning alleged use of chemical weapons, and each State Party must take on a percentage of responsibility for the road ahead and, without distortions, to uphold the plurality of positions—with complete mutual respect—and understand that the world is waiting to finally be free of chemical weapons.

I would like to request that this statement be considered an official document of this session of the Conference.

Thank you.

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