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CROATIA

**STATEMENT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION
DELIVERED BY H.E. AMBASSADOR DUBRAVKA PLEJIĆ MARKOVIĆ
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF CROATIA TO THE OPCW
AT THE NINETY-THIRD SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairperson,
Mr Director-General,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the honour of speaking on behalf of the European Union (EU).

The candidate countries Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Turkey, the potential candidate country Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the EFTA (European Free Trade Association) countries Iceland and Norway, members of the EEA (European Economic Area), as well as Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine align themselves with this statement. Andorra, Monaco and San Marino also associate themselves with this statement.

The European Union would like to thank you for guiding the preparatory work for the Ninety-Third Session of the Executive Council in an effective and transparent manner. We are confident that your able chairing and experience will help us reach a successful conclusion of the session.

We also thank the OPCW Director-General, Ambassador Fernando Arias, for his comprehensive statement. It testifies to the professionalism and capacity of the OPCW Technical Secretariat (hereinafter “the Secretariat”) to implement the Chemical Weapons Convention (hereinafter “the Convention”) and tasks assigned by the States Parties. In this context, and in light of the complementarity of the work between the OPCW and the United Nations, the European Union appreciates the regular sharing of information of the OPCW activities and investigations with the United Nations Secretary-General and the United Nations Security Council.

Regretting the fact that the United Nations Security Council could not agree to prolong the mandate of the Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM), the European Union reiterates its strong support for the work of the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) in the Syrian Arab Republic. We stress once again our full trust in the professionalism, impartiality, and objectivity of the findings of the Mission's reports, including regarding the incident of alleged use of a toxic chemical as a weapon in Douma. The report concludes that the evaluation and analysis of all



information gathered provide reasonable grounds to believe that the use of a toxic chemical as a weapon took place. The EU hopes that this report will be used by the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) to identify the perpetrators of these reprehensible attacks.

As regards the handling of the investigation into possible breaches of confidentiality, as reported by the Secretariat in their briefing and Note (S/1839/2020, dated 6 February 2020), the European Union would like to commend the Secretariat for having conducted the investigation in strict compliance with the rules and procedures set out in the OPCW Policy on Confidentiality (OPOC) approved by the Conference of States Parties, and the Director-General for briefing the States Parties on this matter. The Director-General concluded his statement by reaffirming his confidence in the conclusions of the final report of the FFM regarding the Douma incident. The European Union also stands by the conclusions of the final Douma report.

We commend the OPCW Secretariat for the establishment of the IIT, as mandated by the Decision "Addressing the Threat from Chemical Weapons Use" of 27 June 2018 by the Fourth Special Session of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention. We look forward to the issuing of the Team's first report and the next steps towards identifying those responsible for the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic.

As regards the elimination of the Syrian Chemical Weapons Programme, the European Union expresses grave concerns about the Syrian regime's continued breach of its obligations as a State Party to the Convention due to its failure to provide a complete declaration of its chemical weapons programme and its failure to destroy all of its chemical weapons and chemical weapons production facilities. We urge the Syrian Arab Republic to fully cooperate with the OPCW Secretariat as required under the Convention and the relevant UNSC resolutions to resolve all outstanding issues.

The European Union continues to firmly support the important work of the Fact-Finding Mission, the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) and the Investigation and Identification Team. It is vital to establish the facts on the production and use of these heinous weapons. We call on the Syrian Arab Republic to ensure unfettered and safe access to all locations the FFM and the IIT deem necessary, and to work with the DAT to address the gaps, inconsistencies, and discrepancies identified in its declaration.

In this context, the European Union reiterates that the use of chemical weapons anywhere, at any time, by anyone, under any circumstances is unacceptable. There can be no impunity, and those responsible for the use of chemical weapons must be held accountable. For its part, the European Union currently imposes restrictive measures on a total of 32 persons and two entities in the Syrian Arab Republic, specifically for their role in the development, production, and use of chemical weapons, in violation of the Convention. These restrictive measures have been imposed in the framework of the EU's sanctions regime against the Syrian Arab Republic, and under the EU's autonomous chemical weapons sanctions regime. The European Union is also actively participating in the work of the International Partnership Against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons.

The Twenty-Fourth Session of the Conference of States Parties adopted, by consensus, technical changes to Schedule 1 of the Annex on Chemicals to the Convention. The European Union welcomes this historical and timely decision and the immediate follow-up measures launched by the OPCW Secretariat with a view to its implementation. Through this update

the Convention remains responsive to new and emerging threats, and it can be used to enhance existing export control regimes. We also welcome the recent decision by the Australia Group to add novichok precursors to the AG control list. This decision complements the updates to Schedule of the Convention and strengthens our collective efforts to tackle proliferation threats.

While important progress has been made towards the full destruction of declared stockpiles of chemical weapons and coming close to a universal adherence to the Convention, we need to step up efforts to respond to new challenges. The European Union believes that capacity building plays an essential role in this. Many States Parties require assistance in fulfilling their obligations under the Convention and in coping with the fast-moving developments in science and technology. The EU therefore continues to support the OPCW, including its capacity-building efforts at national and regional level through important voluntary funding worth EUR 3.5 million until 2022.

The successful transformation of the OPCW laboratory into a Centre for Chemistry and Technology (ChemTech Centre) will be key to enhancing the Organisation's capacity to perform its core tasks in verification, inspection, and capacity building. We commend Canada and Indonesia for their efforts as chairs of the Friends of the ChemTech Centre in garnering support for the project. Many States Parties have already committed voluntary funding to the establishment of the ChemTech Centre. For our part, the European Union has committed EUR 8.1 million for this purpose. We call upon all States Parties to express their support and contribute to this project that will benefit all States Parties.

The European Union would like to thank the Director-General Fernando Arias for drawing the States Parties attention to the financial situation of the OPCW in his Note (S/1853/2020, dated 24 February 2020). The Director-General anticipates that based upon cash flow forecast and experience from 2018 and 2019, the working capital fund (WCF) will need to be utilised again in order to maintain liquidity in 2020. We therefore urge all States Parties to pay their assessed contributions in full and on time.

Last but not least, the European Union would like to pay tribute to the co-facilitators Ambassador Puja of Indonesia and Ambassador Vásquez Gómez of El Salvador for their remarkable stamina, perseverance, and hard work, which is bringing results. It is important to keep the positive momentum on the basis of their work. The European Union and its Member States look forward to continuing contributing to the discussions in a constructive spirit.

I would kindly ask you, Mr Chairperson, to consider this statement as an official document of the Ninety-Third Session of the Council and post it on the OPCW External Server and public website.