



OPCW

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GERMANY

**STATEMENT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION
DELIVERED BY H.E. AMBASSADOR GUDRUN LINGNER
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF GERMANY TO THE OPCW
AT THE NINETY-FOURTH 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 pays tribute to Ambassador Andrea Perugini of Italy for his professional chairing and consensus-driven approach during his tenure at the helm of the Executive Committee of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) for the last 12 months. Sir, we applaud your dedication to and even-handedness in chairing the Executive Council. Your chairmanship contributed to ensuring continuity in the work of the Council, for which we are grateful to you.

The European Union congratulates Ambassador Agustín Vázquez Gómez for his appointment as the new Chairperson of the Executive Committee. Sir, we would like to thank you for guiding the preparatory work for the Ninety-Fourth Session of the Executive Council in an effective and transparent manner under exceptional circumstances. You have played a key role together with the Bureau members in formulating the organisational modalities, which made convening this session possible. We are confident that your able chairing and experience will help us reach a successful conclusion of the session.

We also take this opportunity to thank the OPCW Technical Secretariat through its Director-General, Ambassador Fernando Arias, for their efforts with a view to ensuring business continuity in the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) to the extent possible following the outbreak of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). We commend the Director-General for his ongoing efforts to improve gender balance and geographical distribution of positions within the Technical Secretariat. We encourage him to continue these efforts with a view to ensuring a more diverse and representative Technical Secretariat as well as to strengthening training and knowledge management to mitigate effects of rotation.



The European Union is committed, at the highest level, to supporting the OPCW in its efforts to implement the decision of States Parties, in June 2018, to put in place arrangements to identify the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic.

The European Union welcomes the release of the first report of the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) to the OPCW Executive Council and to the Secretary-General of the United Nations on 8 April 2020. We fully support the work of the IIT and note with great concern the conclusions of its report.

The European Union strongly condemns the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian Arab Air Force as concluded by the report. Those identified responsible for the use of chemical weapons must be held accountable for these reprehensible acts.

Accountability is essential to prevent the re-emergence of chemical weapons. The use of chemical weapons by anyone—be it a State or a non-State actor—anywhere, at any time, and under any circumstances is a violation of international law and can amount to the most serious crimes of international concern—war crimes and crimes against humanity. The European Union continues to demonstrate its commitment through the Partnership Against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons.

Impunity for these horrible acts will not be tolerated. The European Union has already imposed restrictive measures on high-level Syrian officials, scientists and entities for their role in the development and use of chemical weapons. We are ready to consider introducing further measures as appropriate. The European Union will continue to work towards ensuring accountability for those responsible for these egregious crimes on national as well as international levels.

It is now up to the International Community to take appropriate action. The European Union is determined to ensure that this clear violation of the core principles of the Convention receives the strongest possible response from the Chemical Weapons Convention's States Parties. In accordance with the Convention, the Executive Council has the role and the responsibility to formulate the elements of this response.

The European Union urges all States Parties to live up to their responsibility to protect the integrity of the Convention, a key instrument of the international non-proliferation and arms control regime, and to uphold the global chemical weapons non-use norm. In light of the conclusions of the IIT report and taking into account the continued breach of its obligations as a State Party to the Convention, the European Union calls for setting clear and verifiable parameters for action that the Syrian Arab Republic needs to take to return to full compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention.

We reiterate our full confidence in the technical expertise, objectivity, impartiality, and independence of the OPCW Technical Secretariat and its Investigation and Identification Team, and look forward to the timely publication of its next report.

The outbreak of COVID-19 is a test of our humanity, but also of the multilateral system itself. The rules-based international order—with the UN at its core—must be upheld and strengthened. The EU underlines the importance of full implementation and enforcement of multilateral disarmament, non-proliferation, and arms control treaties and regimes, including the Chemical Weapons Convention.

The impact of COVID-19 on the implementation of the CWC, including verification and international cooperation and assistance as well as on the functioning of the policy-making organs, needs to be thoroughly analysed. This should be based on lessons identified/learned exercise and best practices identified by other international organisations for the Organisation to be better prepared to face unforeseen developments and circumstances. This may imply eventual adjustments of structures and of working modalities, including remotely in the absence of possibility to meet in person through adopting and fully utilising technology.

While important progress has been made towards full destruction of declared stockpiles of chemical weapons and coming close to universality of adherence to the CWC, fast-moving developments in science and technology require stepping up efforts to respond to new challenges. The European Union believes that capacity building will continue to play an essential role in this respect. Many States Parties require assistance in fulfilling their obligations under the Convention. The EU, therefore, continues to support the OPCW capacity-building efforts at national and regional level through voluntary contributions.

A 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, and to addressing new challenges in new ways. An important number of States Parties from across the globe have committed voluntary funding to the establishment of the ChemTech Centre. The European Union has made a substantial voluntary contribution to this project which will benefit all States Parties.

Implementation of the Convention requires a predictable and solid financial base as well as a tailor-made professional structure. We, therefore, call on all States Parties to pay their assessed contributions in full and on time. The European Union Member States assessed contributions combined make up almost 25% of the regular budget. In addition, the EU's voluntary contribution in support of the OPCW key activities and operations for the period 2019-2022 through two dedicated EU Council Decisions amounts to EUR 12.6 million. This voluntary contribution does not include voluntary contributions made by EU Member States in their national capacity.

The European Union reiterates its full support to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and underlines the complementarity of its work with that of the United Nations. In this context, the European Union appreciates the regular sharing of information of the OPCW activities and investigations with the United Nations Secretary-General and the UN Security Council.

I would kindly ask you to consider this statement as an official document and post it on the OPCW external server and public website.

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