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GERMANY

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR GUDRUN LINGNER
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY
TO THE OPCW
AT THE NINETY-FOURTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairperson,
Mr Director-General,
Distinguished Colleagues,

Germany fully aligns itself with the statement of the European Union, presented by Germany in its capacity as EU presidency. We wish to add the following national statement.

Let me start by congratulating H.E. Agustin Vásquez Gómez who assumed the difficult task as Chair of the Executive Council in May. Right from the start of his mandate, our Chairperson had to navigate through very stormy waters, as the world is living through the COVID-19 pandemic and its social, political, and not least economic consequences. The current health crisis puts under enormous pressure the way our world has functioned for decades. This also affects the OPCW. However, the ongoing turmoil induced by the pandemic should not let us forget the promise we gave as signatory states of the Chemical Weapons Convention: to strive for a world free of chemical weapons. Our Organisation, the OPCW, must continue to make this promise come true, and we, the States Parties, should spare no effort in supporting it in order to reach this goal.

Having this in mind, Germany would like to applaud the leadership provided by the Director-General of the OPCW, H.E. Fernando Arias, and the Technical Secretariat in assuring continuity. Despite the very difficult circumstances, they were able to present to the world, on 8 April, the first report of the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team (IIT). A few weeks later, modalities were found in order to allow the holding of this Ninety-Fourth Executive Council, ensuring that all current OPCW matters of importance can be discussed. Germany would like to thank our Chairperson and the Director-General, and compliment them on their guidance.

We strongly encourage the OPCW as a whole to continue on this path. During these difficult times of COVID-19, we might be able to learn important lessons on how we can further strengthen the functioning of the OPCW, making our vessel more watertight for coming storms. This includes providing for clear procedures that enable formal and informal consultations of the OPCW States Parties in contingency circumstances. The option of digital, interactive consultations as well as the holding of remote Executive Councils in all



official OPCW languages must be made applicable as swiftly as possible when no in-person meetings can be scheduled at the OPCW building. The OPCW as a pillar of our multilateral world and international disarmament structure, must prove functional under any possible circumstances. Germany stands ready to support the OPCW in this.

The presentation of the first IIT report on 8 April 2020 was an important moment in the history of the OPCW. Germany welcomes the publication of this report and takes note of its findings with greatest concern. Let me point out that the report itself provides ample proof that the IIT investigations were conducted with the utmost care, expertise, impartiality, and transparency. This is obvious to anyone who reads the report and its annexes. The briefing provided by Director-General Fernando Arias and the IIT coordinator Onate on 8 April to all States Parties, as well as the one on 12 May to the members of the United Nations Security Council,¹ underlined once more that the IIT working methodology is exemplary and of the highest scientific standard. Germany does not see any basis for States Parties to continue to question the authority of proven OPCW experts and the IIT report. We believe it is unjustified to criticise the IIT for not investigating on the ground, when despite the many requests documented in the annexes of the report, the IIT has never been granted visas enabling the team to enter Syria. Fortunately, as German experts have confirmed after carefully studying the IIT report, the lack of access to the sites where the attacks took place was compensated. Combining a multitude of interviews with eyewitnesses, thorough analyses of samples, laboratory results and of munition remnants with advice from international experts and forensic institutes, along with other relevant material and sources, the report's conclusions are, I repeat it, beyond doubt.

The first IIT report concludes that members of the Syrian Arab Air Force are to be held responsible for the use of sarin-containing aerial bombs on 24 and 30 March 2017, as well as the dropping of a chlorine-filled cylinder on a hospital in Ltamenah on 25 March 2017. Germany condemns this use of chemical weapons in the strongest possible terms. We request the international community and the OPCW to act upon the IIT findings. On 8 April, those responsible for three heinous attacks in March 2017 have been identified. Impunity must not be allowed.

As the IIT coordinator rightly pointed out during the presentation of the report, these attacks could only have been carried out through the involvement of the highest military authorities of the Syrian Arab Republic. This constitutes a clear breach of the Chemical Weapons Convention by the Syrian Arab Republic. In reaction, as defined in Article VIII of the Convention, the OPCW Executive Council has to respond to this case of non-compliance. To that aim, Germany has been working with others in a collective effort that united States Parties from all regional groups, striving to prepare a decision for the Ninety-Fourth Executive Council in reaction to the IIT findings. This proposed decision is carefully drafted in accordance with the Convention and well balanced. It urgently requests the Syrian Arab Republic to come back into compliance and redress the situation. We call on all States Parties, members of the Executive Council to fulfil their responsibility and support this decision. We must uphold the credibility of the Convention. Germany wishes to state unequivocally that we are not ready to accept or overlook non-compliance. Later this year, the Conference of the States Parties will decide the further course of action, in accordance with Article XII of the Convention.

Germany thanks the Secretariat for the presentation of the first draft for the 2021 budget. We will study it very carefully. In a world clearly not yet free of chemical weapons, the OPCW and its Secretariat continue to have very important and challenging tasks. We, States Parties, have to ensure that the Organisation has the means to fulfil its mandate. In this perspective, deciding an appropriate OPCW budget is an imperative. The zero nominal growth policy that has been applied for the last few years has over time resulted in a de facto reduction of the OPCW budget. This is problematic, because at the same time, tasks have become more challenging and more numerous. To help enable the OPCW to address some of them, voluntary funds have been created and States Parties have contributed additional funding; but this is not a sustainable solution. We must keep this imbalance in mind when studying the budget proposal.

I cannot end this intervention without welcoming the important progress made in 2020 concerning the planning of the OPCW Centre for Chemistry and Technology. The development of this new laboratory will be instrumental in the fulfilling of future OPCW tasks, not least in the field of training and capacity building for young scientists from all over the world. A few months ago, Germany, therefore, contributed EUR 1.0 million to the ChemTech Trust Fund. We note with satisfaction that the Director-General's tireless efforts to summon support for the new laboratory have been successful across all regional groups. Germany calls upon all States Parties, if they have not done so yet, to join our common endeavour. Together, we shall enable the OPCW to make further progress in the realisation of this major future-oriented project. The OPCW also relies on the network of designated national laboratories. To strengthen this network and to contribute to international cooperation as stipulated in Article XI of the Convention, the German Bundeswehr Research Institute for Protective Technologies and CBRN Protection (WIS) is ready to share its expertise and knowledge and offer support to a partner laboratory in the framework of the Twinning Initiative.

Thank you, Mr Chairperson.

Germany kindly asks that this statement be designated as an official document and posted on both the external server and the public website.