

The 95th Session of the Executive Council of the OPCW
General Debate
Statement by H.E. Ambassador Yeondoo Jeong
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25 September 2020, The Hague

Mr. Chairperson,
Mr. Director-General,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

The Republic of Korea expresses its sincere appreciation to Chairperson Ambassador Agustin Vasquez Gomez of El Salvador for his exceptional leadership. We would not have been able to meet again for this Session without the Chairperson's determination and guidance in facing the unprecedented challenges posed by COVID-19. My delegation has full confidence that this Session will also be guided to a successful outcome under his able leadership, as in the last Session.

Korea also extends its gratitude to Director-General Fernando Arias and all the staff members of the Technical Secretariat for redoubling their efforts to continue to fulfill their important missions in the midst of the global health crisis. We note with appreciation contingency measures being taken by the Secretariat to minimize the impact of COVID-19 as well as the regular updates provided to the States Parties. Their professionalism and devotion are to be commended.

Mr. Chairperson,

Since 2013, we have witnessed an increasing number of chemical weapons use around the world, such as in Syria, Malaysia, and the UK. Our collective efforts to restore eroding international norms against use of chemical weapons have yielded tangible results with the adoption by the Conference of the States Parties of two milestone decisions: one in June 2018 which established the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) to identify perpetrators of chemical weapons use in Syria, and one in November 2019 which newly added nerve agents known as "Novichok" and other highly toxic chemicals into Schedule 1 of the Chemicals Annex.

However, the Chemical Weapons Convention, which we have all pledged to uphold, is once again being challenged by yet another use of a weapons-grade nerve agent. The German Government wrote, in its letter to the Director General on 3 September, that a nerve agent from the so-called "Novichok group" could be determined as the source of poisoning of Mr. Alexei Navalny. We note with appreciation that the Secretariat has provided the German Government with technical assistance in accordance with Article VIII of the Convention.

The Government of the Republic of Korea notes with serious concern that a nerve agent was used against an individual. Korea condemns in the strongest possible terms any use of chemical weapons - anywhere, at any time, by anyone under any circumstances. All those responsible for chemical weapons use must be held accountable for their unforgivable acts.

We call on all relevant States Parties to fully cooperate with the Technical Secretariat of the OPCW to establish the facts and the circumstances around this incident in a transparent and impartial manner. We await with great interest information from the Technical Secretariat on the outcomes of the independent analysis by the OPCW designated laboratories.

Mr. Chairperson,

The Republic of Korea welcomes the adoption of the EC Decision EC-94/DEC.2 (9 July 2020), which Korea voted in favour of. The Decision was a responsible reaction by the Executive Council to the first report of the IIT, which concluded that there are reasonable grounds to believe that the Syrian Arab Air Force used sarin and chlorine as chemical weapons in three different Ltamenah incidents in March 2017.

The adoption of the Decision last July was indeed a step forward. A single decision by the Executive Council, however, will not be sufficient to resolve the problem in the absence of immediate measures by Syria. We urge the Syrian Arab Republic to take all actions requested by the Decision to redress the situation, including those stated in paragraph 5 of the Decision.

The Republic of Korea reiterates its unwavering support for the OPCW Syria-related mechanisms, including the FFM, the DAT, and the IIT. The three teams, fulfilling their mandates in a transparent, independent, and impartial way, have surpassed all of our expectations. We note with concern that due to COVID-19 Syria-related missions have not been fully operational since early this year. Korea, looking forward to continued updates from the Secretariat on its operations during the global pandemic, sincerely hopes that its missions will resume in the near future.

Mr. Chairperson,

Korea believes that the current draft Programme and Budget for 2021 proposed by the Secretariat are well devised to meet the range of challenges faced by the organization. We note that the Secretariat's draft seeks to achieve maximum operational effectiveness whilst also taking into consideration restrictions faced as a result of COVID-19 and the zero nominal growth (ZNG) principle. My delegation commends the work done by the co-facilitators, Mr Marcin Kawalowski of Poland and Mr Matteo Fachinotti of Switzerland, and of course by all the able staff of the Secretariat.

Korea supports the proposals by the Secretariat, including that of allocating the 2018 cash surplus to meet the four urgent needs. In particular, Korea believes that creating the COVID-19 Variability

Impact Fund will be of value in reducing risks resulting from the uncertainties whilst also reflecting the principle of ZNG.

We concur with the Secretariat that the Programme and Budget for 2021 should be presented as a single draft decision. Given that different elements in the Budget proposal are closely interlinked, an omnibus approach will help the Executive Council and the Conference address the 2021 budget in a more efficient and effective way.

Mr. Chairperson,

COVID-19 continues to cast doubts on whether we may soon be able to resume our normal lives. Uncertainties around the global pandemic have been putting strains on the work of the OPCW as well, making full implementation of planned OPCW programmatic activities in 2020 impossible.

As many forecast, the global infections will unfortunately continue to place limitations on the entire world for the time being. Yet nonetheless it is important that the OPCW continues to conduct its core activities, such as verification and inspections, to the greatest extent possible. In this regard, the Republic of Korea appreciates the Secretariat's ongoing mitigation efforts, in particular its wide utilization of online tools in international cooperation activities and in a number of informal consultations for EC-95. Of course digital tools can be no replacement for in-person communication in the long term. But we believe that such technologies will surely be of great help in addressing a communications gap that we are experiencing. We encourage the Secretariat to continue to look for such alternative options to fulfill its core mandates effectively and to keep the States Parties updated.

Mr. Chairperson,

As threats from chemical weapons are constantly evolving, it is more important than ever to keep pace with rapid developments in science and technology. Korea is concerned that central nervous system-acting chemicals could potentially be used as chemical weapons under the guise of law enforcement activities. It is indeed time to take action in the policy-making organs to address this pressing matter. In this regard, Korea supports, as a co-sponsor, the draft Decision on Understanding Regarding the Aerosolized Use of Central Nervous System-Acting Chemicals for Law Enforcement Purposes. The support of all delegations for this decision would indeed be most deeply appreciated.

Mr. Chairperson,

Universal adherence to the Convention has been, and continues to be, an utmost priority for the organization since the establishment of the OPCW in 1997. Fully convinced that universality of the Convention is critical in ensuring full implementation of the Convention, Korea urges the four remaining States not Party to the Convention to ratify or accede to it as soon as possible without any preconditions. And Korea looks to the Technical Secretariat to continue to exert efforts for the realization of the shared goal of universality at the earliest possible time.

Mr. Chairperson,

Korea would like to express its appreciation to the Director-General for the comprehensive report on the status of implementation of Article VII. We note with concern that only 62 percent of the States Parties have legislation covering all the initial measures. Korea notes the Secretariat has made significant efforts even in the face of these difficult times to fulfill its mandates under Article VII. We encourage the Secretariat to continue to assist those States Parties which may have a need for support.

Mr. Chairperson,

We note with satisfaction progress on the Chem-Tech Centre project even in the midst of COVID-19. This ambitious initiative is key in enabling the Organization and the States Parties to better address new and evolving threats. In 2017 Korea decided to become the first State Party to make voluntary contributions to further this noble task and we are delighted to continue to do so annually. Bearing in mind that the project is still in need of further funding, we call on all States Parties to pledge their political and financial commitments for this valuable endeavor.

Mr. Chairperson,

Korea has always been committed to capacity-building support for States Parties in Asia. As one of its initiatives for regional cooperation, Korea has since 2012 been hosting on an annual basis an OPCW workshop to assist States Parties in the Asian region to further nurture their capability and capacity in terms of chemical safety and security. This year the ROK Government has been communicating closely with the Technical Secretariat to explore the impact of COVID-19 on the upcoming Seoul Workshop in October. Korea will continue to engage with the Secretariat as well as regional partner States with a view to strengthening regional capabilities and capacities.

In closing, we request that this Statement be circulated as an official document of this Session of the Executive Council and be published on the OPCW website and external server.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson. /END/