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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-FIFTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Mr Chairperson,
Director-General,
Distinguished ambassadors and delegates,

This Ninety-Fifth Session of the OPCW Executive Council certainly is no ordinary meeting. It takes place in extremely difficult circumstances. On the one hand, its logistics and proceedings are defined by an unprecedented health crisis—the COVID-19 pandemic. On the other hand, this Executive Council has to confront yet another use of a chemical weapon which occurred against a Russian citizen, Mr. Alexei Navalny, on Russian soil on 20 August 2020. The past weeks have shown that our strong support as States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention is yet again called for. Let us all rise to the challenge and contribute together to upholding the Convention and the principles that the OPCW is guarding. Let us also refute efforts to discredit the important work and the credibility of the OPCW in international organisations, particularly when such efforts are undertaken by State Parties to the Convention.

I would like to start by giving you a factual overview on the developments of the case of Mr Navalny.

Mr Navalny is a Russian opposition politician who fell seriously ill on a Russian domestic flight from Tomsk to Moscow on 20 August. After an emergency landing of the aircraft, Russian doctors in Omsk treated him for two days. On the request of Mr Navalny's family and organised by a private, humanitarian initiative, the patient was transferred to the Charité Hospital Berlin for further medical treatment. The hospital soon diagnosed that Mr Navalny suffered from severe poisoning. To better define the source of this poisoning, the hospital asked the Institute for Pharmacology and Toxicology in Munich for assistance.

Subsequently, the German Federal Government received alarming information from this specialised laboratory: the experts found clear evidence for the use of a military grade nerve agent belonging to the Novichok group. These findings were unequivocal, based on the best available scientific analysis. They corroborated the fact that Mr Navalny had been poisoned by a chemical nerve agent. The Federal Government asked two other specialised laboratories—one in France and one in Sweden—to double-check these findings and immediately informed the international community as well as the OPCW of the alarming test results. At the same time, the Federal Foreign Office convened the Russian Ambassador in Berlin. He was informed of the findings and asked to convey to his government the German request to fully disclose the circumstances of the poisoning of Mr Navalny.



Any poisoning of an individual through the use of a nerve agent is considered a use of a chemical weapon. And any use of a chemical weapon is a matter of international concern and wholly contrary to international norms. This is why partners from NATO, the European Union, and beyond have reacted to this use of a chemical weapon, which represents a threat to our common security and international law. Germany welcomes the strong expressions of support we have received. We stand united in our determination to uphold the Convention and non-proliferation regimes.

The use of a chemical weapon makes the involvement of the OPCW imperative, which is why Germany sent a letter to the Director-General on 3 September 2020, informing him of the findings of the German specialised laboratory. Subsequently, my government asked the OPCW for technical assistance in order to complement the German findings. My government is extremely grateful for the impartial, highly professional, and swift support that we received from the Technical Secretariat in this regard.

Following due procedures, the OPCW took samples from Mr Navalny in Germany and is analysing these materials thoroughly.

My government is of the opinion that the case of Mr Navalny raises a number of serious questions that only the Russian Federation can answer. It is up to Russia—where the chemical attack occurred—to shed light on the incident, and to provide an explanation on how a chemical nerve agent came to be used in a reckless act against a Russian citizen on Russian soil.

Up to now, the Russian Federation has not provided any credible explanation. Instead, responses not only from Russian media but from official representatives have failed to provide answers. Those statements seek to obfuscate, to deflect responsibility, and to distract from the main point—the use of a military grade nerve agent.

Germany categorically refutes allegations that the incident was “staged”. Let me finish with a clear request: Germany urges the Russian Federation to shed light on how Mr Navalny could be poisoned by a Novichok nerve agent on Russian territory on 20 August. The international community expects a comprehensive and truthful explanation of this abhorrent attack. My government takes note of the announcement by the Russian Federation to cooperate with the OPCW on this issue. We call upon the Russian Federation’s authorities to fully cooperate with the OPCW.

The attack against Mr Navalny is not the only case of chemical weapons use that we had to witness in the last five years. Chemical attacks took place in Iraq, in Malaysia, and in the United Kingdom, and there were repeated incidents in Syria. Germany strongly believes that there is no place for chemical weapons in the twenty-first century. And we are determined to fight against impunity for those who use these horrible weapons. This is why it is so important that the Ninety-Fourth Executive Council last July has taken a crucial decision in response to the findings of the first Investigation and Identification Team’s (IIT) report on several chemical weapons attacks in Ltamenah in 2017. This decision EC-94/DEC.2, dated 9 July 2020, addresses the possession and use of chemical weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic. It sets out clear and verifiable parameters for action that the Syrian Arab Republic is requested to take. Germany reiterates its support for the decision and urges the Syrian Arab Republic to take all the measures required to return to full compliance with the Convention before the end of the 90-day timeframe defined in the decision. Based on the Director-General’s report on actions taken by the Syrian Arab Republic, the upcoming Conference of the States Parties will have to

decide the further course of action in accordance with Article XII of the Convention. We call upon all States Parties to act responsibly and follow the clear guidelines and procedures set out by the adopted July decision and the Convention.

I cannot end this statement without clarifying Germany's position on the draft decision on the Budget proposal for 2021. This Council has to submit the budget decision to the Conference of the States Parties. In light of the repeated use of chemical weapons that we have seen in recent years, there cannot be any doubt: We must strengthen the OPCW to defend and further implement the Convention's aim: a world free of chemical weapons. This is in all our national security interests. The Director-General's proposed Budget for 2021 is proportionate and justified. It will enable the OPCW to continue its tasks, including its cooperation and assistance projects. Therefore, we call on all States Parties to support the budget proposal.

There is a saying that kites fly highest against the wind. With this in mind, I would like to finish on a hopeful note. We are facing times of adversity, but it is during these times that our strengths can grow. Under the able leadership of its remarkable Director-General Fernando Arias, the OPCW is an efficient, highly professional, dedicated, and independent guardian of the Chemical Weapons Convention. For this, we are grateful, and Germany stands ready to defend the OPCW, as well as the principles it represents.

Thank you, Mr Chairperson.

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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