

STATEMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF AUSTRIA

DELIVERED BY H.E. AMBASSADOR ASTRID HARZ

PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF AUSTRIA TO THE OPCW

AT THE 25th CONFERENCE OF STATES PARTIES OF THE OPCW

Mr Chairperson,
Mr Director-General,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Austria is fully aligned with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union by the Ambassador of Germany, Ms Gudrun Lingner. I would nevertheless like to make a few additional remarks in our national capacity. Austria thanks Ambassador Krassimir Kostov for his able leadership of the 24th Conference of States Parties. Austria congratulates Ambassador José Antonio Zabalgaitia Trejo for his nomination as Chairperson of the 25th Conference of States Parties, we look forward to work with you. We continue to thank the Director-General and the staff of the Technical Secretariat for their hard work and their dedication to the OPCW in these challenging times.

We are facing the unprecedented situation the Conference has to meet under stringent restrictions due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Austria fully supports the approach identified by the General Committee in order to ensure the safety and well-being of staff and delegations, while being able to take the necessary decisions. We call on all other States Parties to fully cooperate in order to ensure a safe CSP. This situation also highlights the importance of ensuring business continuity within the OPCW, both for the Technical Secretariat as well as the Policy Making Organs. We therefore fully support the consultation process launched by the Permanent Representation of Germany.

As every year, one of the most important decisions in front of the Conference will be the adoption of the Budget. After an inclusive consultation process, the Executive Council forwarded the draft Programme and Budget of the OPCW for 2021 (C-25/DEC/CRP.3) to the Conference. While it was regrettable that a vote was necessary, the adoption with an overwhelming majority clearly shows the strong support for the draft. Austria continues to support the draft Programme and Budget and we call on other States Parties to do the same in order to allow the Technical Secretariat to continue to implement the important tasks that we have entrusted them with.

The assassination attempt on the Russian citizen Alexei Navalny is yet another shocking use of a military chemical nerve agent of the “Novichok” group that has to be condemned in the strongest terms. Such use of chemical weapons is absolutely unacceptable. We commend Germany and the Technical Secretariat for their ongoing cooperation. We call on the Russian Federation to ensure an impartial and transparent investigation in cooperation with the OPCW and to hold the attackers accountable for their crime. We reiterate our conviction that there cannot be impunity for the use of chemical weapons..

Unfortunately, we had to witness several uses of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic in the past years. Austria continues to fully support the work of the Technical Secretariat, including the Declaration Assessment Team, the Fact-Finding Mission, and the Investigation and Identification Team. After supporting the adoption of EC-Decision 94/2 in July, Austria noted the report EC-96/DG.1 by the Director-General on its implementation by the Syrian Arab Republic. Austria was disappointed by the lack of cooperation by the Syrian Arab Republic and its failure to implement decision EC-94/DEC.2. It is now the responsibility of the Conference to address this issue and Austria supports a CSP-Decision based on the relevant paragraphs of decision EC-94/DEC.2.

Another important issue on the agenda of the Conference is the appointment of the next external auditor. This appointment is a technical decision and must be based on the merits of the nominations. We thank Amb. Kostov for his numerous attempts to enable a consensual decision based on their merits. Like many other States Parties, Austria therefore would welcome the appointment of a panel to evaluate these nominations in order to allow a decision based on objective and substantive criteria and in the best interest of the organisation. Previous precedents in our organisation have shown that such an approach is indeed effective. We believe that such a panel would allow for a consensual appointment based on the merits of the nominations and we call on the three nominating States to support such a panel and work in good faith towards a consensual appointment in the best interest of the OPCW.

In closing, please let me repeat our unwavering support for the work of the OPCW and our full confidence in the Technical Secretariat. I would kindly ask you, Mr. Chairperson, to consider this statement as an official document of the 25th Conference of States Parties and to post it on the OPCW External Server and public website.

I thank you!