



UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR JOSEPH MANSO PERMANENT
REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE OPCW AT THE
TWENTY-FIFTH SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES

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

We gather for the Twenty-Fifth session of the Conference of the States Parties amid continued difficult circumstances. As the world grapples with the ongoing impacts of the pandemic and another surge in COVID-19 cases, we express our deepest sympathies for the loss of life from COVID that has impacted all our nations. Amid these difficulties, we commend States Parties for coming together to address the vital business of the Organization - that is to address another danger to us all – the use of chemical weapons. Both dangers are very real and have taken away countless innocent people from their loved ones, and we have the opportunity and responsibility through this Organization to take action to address the use of chemical weapons in the hopes of eliminating its future use. Today, as in recent years, there remains much work to do.

It is essential for all of us to continue to work together to push for accountability for chemical weapons use. At this annual meeting, it is also essential to address the continuing threat of the Syrian regime’s chemical weapons use; to address growing threats, such as those from central nervous system (CNS)-acting chemicals and the Russian Federation’s continued use of Novichoks; and to address remaining business, including Iran’s and Myanmar’s compliance-related issues and approving the annual Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Program and Budget. It is critical that countries do not shy away from doing what is right and what the Convention demands of us. Unless responsible states step forward and act, others will continue to threaten and use chemical weapons with impunity.

Over the course of this year, the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) has diligently continued its investigative work in accordance with its mandate. In April, the Team’s first report concluded the Syrian military was responsible for three chemical weapons attacks in late March 2017 in Ltamenah, Syria. These findings were disheartening; however, they were certainly not surprising in light of the Assad regime’s history of chemical weapons use. In response to the IIT’s findings, the OPCW Executive Council adopted a decision in July requesting that Syria take measures to redress the situation. The decision was co-sponsored by 40 countries and received support from more than two-thirds of the Executive Council, including members from all OPCW regional groups. On October 14, the Director-General released a report informing States Parties that Syria failed to complete any of the measures set forth in the July Executive Council decision. Again, unfortunate, but not surprising.

The Assad regime has repeatedly stymied investigations into chemical weapons use in Syria and failed to provide requested information to the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) and the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT). The facts are clear: Syria is in non-compliance with its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention. Reports from the DAT, the former OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism, and now, the IIT have repeatedly substantiated this finding. There is no legitimate basis for further denials or wild and ridiculous counter-narratives regarding Syria's repeated use of chemical weapons. Moreover, the Assad regime's violation of the Convention goes beyond maintaining an undeclared chemical weapons stockpile – it includes the particularly heinous repeated use of these weapons against men, women, and children throughout a protracted civil war.

In response to Syria's ongoing violations of the Convention and failure to complete the measures set forth in the July Executive Council decision, likeminded States Parties submitted a decision for consideration by the Conference of the States Parties. If adopted, the decision would suspend Syria's rights and privileges under the Convention – namely its ability to vote and hold office at the OPCW – until Syria fulfills the measures laid out by the Executive Council. The authority of the Conference to suspend the rights and privileges of a State Party is set forth in Article XII, paragraph 2 of the Convention as a measure the Conference can use, upon the recommendation of the Executive Council. It is important to note the draft decision for consideration before the Conference is in direct fulfillment of the July Executive Council decision, which decided if Syria failed to fulfill the measures requested of it, to recommend the Conference adopt a decision at its next session undertaking appropriate action pursuant to paragraph 2 of Article XII of the Convention. That is exactly what the draft decision does.

It is now incumbent upon this body to take action. States Parties must take steps to hold Syria accountable for its use of chemical weapons. In doing so, we uphold the Convention and reaffirm the norm against the use of chemical weapons. Syria has flagrantly violated the Chemical Weapons Convention for far too long. It cannot continue to flout its obligations under the Convention.

The use of a chemical weapon in the poisoning of Alexey Navalny on August 20, 2020 in Tomsk, Siberia was a reprehensible act the United States and many other nations have condemned in the strongest terms. The United States believes that officers from Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) used a nerve agent to poison Mr. Navalny. There are three indisputable facts about this case: First, the attack took place deep inside Russian territory. Second, the victim, Mr. Navalny, is a political opposition figure who was subject to continuous FSB surveillance while in Tomsk. And third, Mr. Navalny was poisoned with a nerve agent from a group of chemical weapons, Novichoks, that only Russia maintains and has used. There is no plausible explanation for Mr. Navalny's poisoning other than Russian government involvement and responsibility. Of course, the Russian government would have us believe otherwise. It has suggested numerous, often contradictory, conspiracy theories. Let's be clear – these types of conspiracy theories are nothing more than a means to deflect attention from the serious questions before the Russian government which it has yet to answer.

The United States has full confidence in the OPCW's findings, which confirmed earlier results from German, French and Swedish labs, that Mr. Navalny was exposed to an unscheduled

Novichok nerve agent. We know the Soviet Union developed Novichok nerve agents in the 1970s and 1980s for use against NATO countries. While Russia has claimed to have eliminated its declared chemical weapons stockpile, its use of a Novichok nerve agent in Salisbury in 2018 demonstrated that Russia clearly has not met its obligations under the Convention, and it still maintains an undeclared chemical weapons program. Russia's repeated use of Novichok agents, first against the Skripals in 2018 and now against Mr. Navalny, is a clear violation of the Convention. Russia's contempt for the international norm against chemical weapons use must not go unchallenged. The United States calls on Russia to join the responsible nations of the world and comply with its international obligations by fully declaring and eliminating its chemical weapons program, including its Novichok stocks.

We continue our efforts to strengthen the OPCW and to ensure the Organization remains fit for purpose, adapting to new and emerging threats. The United States remains concerned regarding the threat posed by the use of aerosolized CNS-acting chemicals for law enforcement purposes. The United States, along with a growing number of co-sponsors, seeks adoption of the draft Executive Council decision recommending that the Conference take a decision affirming the understanding of States Parties that the aerosolized use of CNS-acting chemicals is inconsistent with law enforcement purposes as a "purpose not prohibited" under the Convention. In a joint statement, the United States, together with like-minded countries, highlighted to the Conference the need for action on this issue. Let me only reiterate two points made in that statement. First, the decision would not create any new international obligations for States Parties. Second, it would also not create any financial, administrative, or program and budget implications for the Organization. This is an issue that impacts all States Parties and we urge you to support this important initiative.

The United States remains concerned regarding Iran's compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention. It was here two years ago that the United States announced that we certified Iran in non-compliance with the Convention due to (1) its failure to declare its transfer of chemical weapons to Libya during the Libya-Chad war, (2) its failure to declare its complete holdings of Riot Control Agents (RCAs), and (3) its failure to submit a complete Chemical Weapons Production Facility declaration. Further, the United States stated we have serious concerns Iran is pursuing pharmaceutical-based agents, referred to in this body as CNS-acting chemicals, for offensive purposes. We continue to call on Iran to address these concerns; however, we have not seen Iran take any action to date. The United States continues to identify actions in our diplomatic tool kit, including sanctions, to address these concerns.

At last year's Conference, the United States raised concerns regarding Myanmar's compliance with the Convention. Specifically, the United States provided information confirming Myanmar had a historical chemical weapons program that it failed to declare and destroy. The United States has engaged in several bilateral discussions with Myanmar seeking to address these concerns. The most recent discussion occurred in September 2020. As part of this discussion, the United States provided additional, substantiating information to help facilitate action by Myanmar. To date, Myanmar has taken no action. The United States remains ready to assist Myanmar in complying with its Chemical Weapons Convention obligations. We call on Myanmar to declare its past chemical weapons program so its historical chemical weapons production facility can be accounted for and destroyed in accordance with the Convention. Doing

so will bring us one-step closer to a world free of chemical weapons. We call on other States Parties in a position to do so to offer assistance in this important effort.

In October, the Executive Council voted decisively to recommend the Conference adopt the draft 2021 Program and Budget. I call on all States Parties to agree to the proposed OPCW 2021 Program and Budget so the OPCW can continue to fulfill its essential mission in the coming year. Without an approved budget, the Organization would cease to operate. States Parties must continue to support the Organization so it can work to uphold the norm against chemical weapons use and – for the sake of our collective peace and security – continue its effort to bring chemical weapons use to zero. The Conference adopted the budget overwhelmingly last year, and we are confident it will do so again this year in order that the Organization may continue its critical mission.

Time and again recently, OPCW Member States have been faced with alarming instances of chemical weapons use. These attacks – in Syria, Iraq, Malaysia, the United Kingdom, and now Russia – continue to proliferate. The disinformation and propaganda used to distract us from our business is transparent. It will not deter responsible nations from ensuring that the Conference of the States Parties responds to all chemical weapons threats – continuing threats, growing threats, and remaining business. Only when chemical weapons attacks cease can the Organization focus all its energies on the many areas of peaceful development and cooperation we all desire. We must ensure that no one can use chemical weapons with impunity and that States Parties honor the obligations they undertook when they became party to the Convention. We must not be silent.

I request that this statement be considered an official document of the Twenty-Fifth Session of the Conference of the States Parties and posted on the external server and the public website.

Thank you.