

**Statement of Estonia at the OPCW 25th Session of the Conference of the State Parties
The Hague, 30 November - 4 December 2020**

Mr. Chairperson,

Estonia aligns itself with the statement of the European Union. First, we take this opportunity to recognize the OPCW Technical Secretariat and its Director General, Ambassador Fernando Arias, for their efforts in ensuring business continuity to the extent possible in the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention during the outbreak of COVID-19.

Estonia reiterates its full confidence in the objectivity, impartiality and independence of the OPCW Technical Secretariat and its Investigation and Identification Team and underlines the complementarity of its work with that of the United Nations. Unfortunately, we are facing today a systematic and targeted disinformation campaign to discredit and undermine the OPCW and the work of its Technical Secretariat. This is deeply concerning and unacceptable. Estonia, as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, appreciates the regular sharing of information of the OPCW activities and investigations, both with the United Nations Secretary-General and the UN Security Council.

Mr. Chairperson,

The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction remains one of the most serious concerns for international peace and security. The re-emergence of chemical weapons in recent years is a disturbing illustration of this. Not only is the use of chemical weapons by anyone and anywhere a grave violation of the international law, but it also undermines the integrity of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Estonia strongly condemns the usage of a military chemical nerve agent of the Novitschok group to poison the Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny. We urge Russia to cooperate fully with the OPCW in ensuring an impartial international investigation and to hold accountable those responsible for the crime committed against Mr. Navalny. We note with great concern that it is not the first time in recent years that Novichok is used. The 2018 attack against the Skripals in the UK and the poisoning of Mr. Navalny show a systematic approach.

Chemical weapons cannot be used with impunity and those responsible for their use must be held accountable. To this end, Estonia welcomes the restrictive measures imposed by the European Union under its chemical weapons sanctions regime against six Russian individuals and one entity involved in the assassination attempt of Mr. Navalny.

Mr. Chairperson,

Estonia strongly condemns the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian Arab Air Force, as concluded by the first report of the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team to the OPCW Executive Council and to the Secretary General of the United Nations on 8 April 2020. Estonia welcomes the Executive Council decision EC-94/DEC.2 of 9 July 2020 that sets clear and verifiable parameters for actions that the Syrian Arab Republic needs to take in order to return to full compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention.

We learn from the Director-General report that the Syrian Arab Republic failed to complete within the set timeline the measures contained in the Executive Council decision of 9th of July. The complete lack of cooperation with the OPCW must have consequences. We urge States Parties to support the adoption of the draft Decision “Addressing the Possession and use of Chemical Weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic” by the Conference of States Parties.

Mr. Chairperson,

It is paramount that the OPCW continues to exercise effectively its key activities under the extraordinary and unforeseen circumstances. It is therefore timely to analyse the lessons learned from the current pandemic and assess how to do so best. We encourage exploring the use of sustainable digital solutions in this regard.

Estonia 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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