

Statement by H.E. Kateřina Sequensová, Permanent Representative of
the Czech Republic to the OPCW, at the 25th Session of the Conference
of the States Parties

Mr Chairperson, Mr Director-General, distinguished delegates,

The Czech Republic fully aligns itself with the statement of the European Union. I would like to make a few remarks in our national capacity.

At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Ambassador Zabalgaitia Trejo, on your election as the Chairperson of this session of the Conference of the States Parties. You have the full support of my delegation and we are confident that you will be able to steer our proceedings during the conference towards a successful outcome. I would also like to express our deep appreciation for the work of Ambassador Krassimir Kostov, Chairperson of the 24th session of the Conference, during the past twelve months.

The Czech Republic wants to take this opportunity to thank the OPCW Director-General Ambassador Fernando Arias for his leadership in steering the organization through this unprecedented period which has presented numerous challenges with ensuring both the implementation of the Convention and the health and safety of the OPCW employees.

The Czech Republic supports the draft Programme and Budget for 2021 as presented by the Director-General and recommended for approval by the Executive Council. The proposed spending level is justified and maintains the level of assessed contributions for all States Parties. We hope that all States Parties will support the adoption of the proposed budget which will allow the OPCW to continue its essential activities, including inspections, assistance programmes, and international cooperation. We would also like to use this opportunity to reiterate the important obligation of all States Parties to pay their assessed contributions on time and in full.

The Czech Republic strongly condemns the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian Arab Air Force which was confirmed by the first report of the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) presented in April of this year. At its 94th session in July 2020, the Executive Council took an important decision in response to the findings of the IIT. It established a period of 90 days during which the Syrian Arab Republic was given an opportunity to declare its chemical weapons and facilities and resolve all outstanding issues regarding its initial declaration. We regret that the Syrian Arab Republic has not used this opportunity to redress the situation as the Director-General reported on 14 October. Therefore the Czech Republic considers that the Conference of the States Parties should take further action and fully supports the adoption of the draft decision „Addressing the Possession and use of Chemical Weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic“.

The appalling assassination attempt on Alexei Navalny who was poisoned on the territory of the Russian Federation by a chemical nerve agent of the “Novichok“ group is a matter of grave concern for the Czech Republic. We thank the Director-General and the Technical

Secretariat for a timely conduct of a technical assistance visit to Germany in order to obtain biomedical samples. Their analysis in two OPCW designated laboratories confirmed earlier findings by three independent laboratories in Germany, Sweden and France about the exposure of Mr. Navalny to a “Novichok“ nerve agent. A transparent impartial investigation is needed to shed light on the circumstances of this crime and we call on the Russian Federation to fully cooperate with the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the international community in this respect. Those responsible for this attack must be held accountable, impunity for the use of chemical weapons must not be tolerated.

The Czech Republic believes that building capacity of States Parties to respond to chemical threats and incidents is of crucial importance. It is for this reason that we have been a long-term supporter of OPCW assistance and protection activities based on Article X of the Convention. Our support is both financial by providing a voluntary contribution and in-kind by hosting training courses and conducting trainings in recipient countries, for example in the East African Community. In the past months, the events had to be moved to a virtual platform but we hope to return to in-person trainings as soon as circumstances allow.

Last but definitely not least, we would like to reiterate the key role of the Centre for Chemistry and Technology for the future of the OPCW. The Czech Republic has previously provided a voluntary financial contribution to the project and we are pleased to see that nearly all of the necessary funding has already been raised. In this respect, we would like to recognize the Technical Secretariat’s efforts to keep the project on track despite the current exceptional circumstances.

Thank you, Mr Chairperson.

I would like to ask that this statement be made an official document of this session and be posted on the OPCW External Server and public website.