



STATEMENT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION
BY H.E. AMBASSADOR MARJOLIJN VAN DEELEN
SPECIAL ENVOY FOR DISARMAMENT AND NON-PROLIFERATION
AT THE 25th SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF STATES PARTIES TO THE
CHEMICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION
(The Hague, 30 November – 1 December 2020)

I have the honour of speaking on behalf of the European Union (EU).

The Candidate Countries Albania, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia and Turkey, and the EFTA (European Free Trade Association) countries Iceland and Norway, members of the EEA (European Economic Area), as well as Georgia and Ukraine align themselves with this statement.

Andorra, Monaco and San Marino also associate themselves with this statement.

Mr Chairperson,

The European Union would like to pay tribute to Ambassador Krassimir Kostov of Bulgaria, Chairperson of the 24th Conference of States Parties and Ambassador Agustin Vasquez Gomez of El Salvador, Chairperson of the Executive Council, for their tireless efforts and outstanding performance in fulfilling their duties. We also warmly congratulate Ambassador Jose Antonio Zabalgaitia Trejo of Mexico for his election as the Chairperson of the Conference of States Parties. We are confident that his professional experience will help us reach a successful conclusion of the 25th Session.

We take this opportunity to thank the OPCW Director-General Ambassador Fernando Arias for his leadership in ensuring the implementation of the Convention in spite of challenges caused by the outbreak of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). We appreciate the Director-General's efforts from the beginning of his tenure to improve gender balance and geographical distribution of positions within the Technical Secretariat. We encourage him to continue these efforts with a view to ensuring a more diverse and representative Technical Secretariat as well as to strengthening training and knowledge management to mitigate effects of rotation. We also commend the Director-General for his efforts to enhance gender mainstreaming, and welcome the on-going gender audit of the Organisation.

The European Union reiterates its full confidence in the OPCW Technical Secretariat (TS), its professionalism, impartiality and well-established technical expertise in implementing the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and tasks assigned by the States Parties. We remain steadfast in defending the Organisation against deliberate and baseless attacks on its integrity and credibility. In this context, we underline the complementarity of the work between the OPCW and the United Nations and appreciate the regular sharing of information of the OPCW activities and investigations with the United Nations Secretary-general and the UN Security Council.

Mr Chairperson,

The use of chemical weapons by anyone – be it a State or a non-State actor – anywhere, at any time and under any circumstances is a violation of international law and can amount to the most serious crimes of international concern - war crimes and crimes against humanity. The re-emergence of chemical weapons is one of the most urgent threats to international peace and security and has to be dealt with firmly and collectively. The European Union urges all States Parties to live up to their responsibility to protect the integrity of the Convention, a key instrument of the international non-proliferation and disarmament regime, and to uphold the global chemical weapons non-use norm.

The European Union condemns in the strongest possible terms the assassination attempt on Alexei Navalny, who was poisoned in Russia by a chemical nerve agent of the “Novichok” group, as has been confirmed by three independent specialised laboratories from Germany, France and Sweden as well as by two OPCW designated laboratories following an OPCW Technical Assistance Visit (TAV) (Ref. S/1906/2020, dated 6 October 2020).

This assassination attempt against a Russian citizen took place on the territory of the Russian Federation. The Russian government must do its utmost to disclose the circumstances of this crime in full transparency and bring those responsible to justice. The European Union calls upon the Russian Federation to fully cooperate with the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to ensure an impartial international investigation.

Impunity for the use of chemical weapons must not and will not be tolerated. On 14 October 2020 under its chemical weapons sanctions regime, the European Union imposed restrictive measures against six Russian individuals and one entity responsible for the implementation of internal policies and internal security and for the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention. The EU will continue to closely follow the issue and consider its implications in the OPCW as well as in a wider international context.

Mr Chairperson,

The European Union 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 (IIT) to the OPCW Executive Council and to the Secretary General of the United Nations on 8 April 2020.

In response to the findings of the IIT report, the Executive Council in July 2020 (EC-94) took a crucially important decision on addressing the possession and use of chemical weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic (EC-94/DEC.2 of 9 July 2020). In accordance with the Convention, the decision set clear and verifiable parameters for action that the Syrian Arab Republic was required to take within 90 days to redress the situation and to return to full compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention.

In his report to the Executive Council on 14 October 2020 (ref. EC-96/DG.1), the OPCW Director-General informed that the Syrian Arab Republic has not declared to the Technical Secretariat any facilities where the chemical weapons used in the 24, 25 and 30 March 2017 attacks were developed, produced, stockpiled, and operationally stored for delivery, nor any chemical weapons it currently possesses. Consequently, in accordance with Article XII of the Convention, it will be upon the Conference of the States Parties to consider further action. The European Union considers that the draft Decision “Addressing the Possession and use of Chemical Weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic” is an appropriate response by the Conference of States Parties and urges States Parties to support its adoption. The European Union and its Member States have made voluntary contributions amounting to EUR 9.3 million to the OPCW’s Trust Fund for Syria Missions, and encourage other States Parties to do the same.

For its part, the European Union has already imposed restrictive measures on 9 high level Syrian officials and scientists and 1 entity for their role in the development and use of chemical weapons. We are ready to consider introducing further measures as appropriate, and continue to work towards ensuring accountability for those responsible for these egregious crimes on national as well as international levels. The European Union also continues to demonstrate its commitment through the Partnership Against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons.

Mr. Chairperson,

The Chemical Weapons Convention is a key instrument of the global non-proliferation and disarmament architecture. It requires a predictable and solid financial base to reach a world free of chemical weapons. The Director-General’s proposed programme and budget 2021 is proportionate and justified. It maintains the level of assessed contributions for all States Parties. The budget will enable the OPCW to continue its vital work throughout 2021, including cooperation and assistance projects. The European Union urges all States Parties to support the adoption of the Director-General’s draft budget as recommended by the Executive Council. In this context the EU calls upon all States Parties to pay their assessed contributions fully and timely.

The European Union believes that the external auditor of the OPCW should be nominated based on technical merits and we would see value in establishing a panel of Ambassadors, as it was the practice in the past, in order to assess the three nominations, on the basis of the factors outlined in S/1824/2020.

A successful transformation of the OPCW laboratory into a Centre for Chemistry and Technology (CCT) will be key to enhancing the Organisation's capacity to perform its core tasks in verification, inspection and capacity building. A significant number of States Parties have committed voluntary funding to the establishment of the "ChemTechCentre". The European Union and its Member States have made substantial voluntary contributions to this project, in total amounting to EUR 15,9 million. We would like to recognise the Technical Secretariat's efforts in keeping the "ChemTechCentre" –project on track despite the exceptional circumstances. We call on all States Parties to support and contribute to this project which will benefit all States Parties.

Mr Chairperson,

The impact of COVID-19 on the implementation of the CWC needs to be thoroughly analysed. This should be informed by lessons learnt and best practices identified, including those of other relevant international organisations, also with a view to providing general guidance for other unforeseen circumstances. The aim should be to allow the OPCW to exercise its key activities - notably convening sessions or meetings of the Executive Council, in case that extraordinary circumstances occur - be it at another venue in The Hague or remotely, by using virtual meeting technology. The European Union values the ongoing reflection exercise in this regard and looks forward to concrete proposals for the consideration of the Executive Council.

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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