

Statement by Ambassador Gudrun Lingner

Permanent Representative of the Federal Republic of Germany to the OPCW

At the twenty fourth session of the Conference of the States Parties

Mr Chairman,
Director-General,
Excellencies, Colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Germany fully aligns itself with the statement of the European Union.

Let me first congratulate Ambassador José Antonio Zabalgaitia Trejo of Mexico on his election as Chairperson of the 25th Conference of States Parties (CSP). Mr. Chairman, I assure you of my delegation's full cooperation and support. I would also like to express our gratitude to Ambassador Krassimir Kostov of Bulgaria for his tireless efforts as the Chair of the 24th CSP. In addition, we thank the Chairperson of the Executive Council, Ambassador Augustin Vasquez-Gomez of El Salvador, for his steady hand in guiding the preparatory Council work for this CSP session.

2020 has been an extremely difficult year, as a global pandemic confronted us with unprecedented challenges. The essence of all multilateral work is meeting others, exchanging views, negotiating solutions and implementing them together. Thus, COVID-19 seriously hampered our usual way of jointly moving forward. It put multilateral cooperation to the test, at the very moment when more and not less multilateral cooperation was necessary, as we needed to create more common ground in order to find common solutions to ever more pressing global problems. Therefore, in times of travel restrictions, when in the framework of the OPCW inspections, cooperation workshops or even simple meetings in person could not take place or had to be adapted to new modalities, true leadership was needed in order to rise to the challenge. Our Chairmen have provided this leadership, supported by the unfaltering guidance of the Director-General of the OPCW, Ambassador Fernando Arias and the Organisation's Technical Secretariat (TS). Germany is grateful for their hard work and commends the professionalism and capacity of the TS in these difficult times.

We, the States Parties, have assigned the OPCW with the task of implementing the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), and this requires the necessary resources. Providing an appropriate budget is a precondition for enabling the OPCW to fulfil its mandate. Hence, Germany urges all States Parties to support the adoption of the 2021 Programme and Budget as has been recommended by the 95th Executive Council. The 2021 budget is proportionate, well balanced and justified while maintaining the 2020 level of assessed contributions. In this context, Germany also calls upon all States Parties to pay their assessed contributions fully and timely.

Apart from providing the budgetary means, we can only rise to the challenge of implementing the Convention if we also constantly adapt our working methods to new circumstances. The

current pandemic has strikingly revealed the vulnerability of the OPCW decision taking processes when Policy Making Bodies have to rely exclusively on physical meetings. Germany believes that all States Parties must together define procedures that allow us to work even when health hazards or other emergency circumstances are hindering us to meet in larger numbers. To this aim, Germany has initiated informal consultations among States Parties and we hope to be able to facilitate consensus on the way forward. In order to make it possible for the Executive Council to one day be convened virtually in case of emergency circumstances, certain technological capabilities within the TS must be enhanced. Germany has therefore decided in November 2020 to make the voluntary financial contribution of one million Euro to the OPCW Trust Fund for Security and Business Continuity. We hope that this contribution will allow the OPCW to become even more resilient towards any case of force majeure. For an effective global ban on chemical weapons, we need a robust OPCW.

Mr. Chairman,

Unfortunately, the ban on chemical weapons has been violated several times in recent years, as the world had to witness chemical weapon attacks taking place repeatedly in Syria, in Malaysia, the United Kingdom, and in August 2020 on Russian territory. Germany is determined to fight against impunity for those who use these horrible weapons. The OPCW has been continuously working on the follow-up of the use of chemical weapons in Syria since 2013. Yet, the cooperation with Syria to complete the Syrian Declaration in accordance with the CWC has not led to significant progress, in spite of 23 rounds of consultations within the structured dialogue. We urge Syria to finally fully declare its CW program and to provide a complete explanation for all gaps and inconsistencies of its Declaration. This request was also formulated once more by decision EC94/DEC.2 dated 9 July 2020. The decision addresses the possession and use of chemical weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic particularly in light of the findings of the first report by the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team (IIT), published on 8 April 2020. The conclusions of this IIT report are very clear: Members of the Syrian Arab Air Force are to be held responsible for the use of aerial bombs containing sarin on 24 and 30 March, as well as the dropping of a chlorine-filled cylinder on a hospital in Ltamenah on 25 March 2017. Consequently to these findings, the Executive Council in July adopted the above-mentioned decision and set out clear and verifiable parameters for action for the Syrian Arab Republic to comply with the CWC and redress the situation before the end of a 90-days' timeframe. This timeframe ended on 7 October. In his subsequent report to the Executive Council (ref. EC-96/DG.1), the OPCW Director-General informed States Parties that the Syrian Arab Republic had refused to take any of the actions requested by the Executive Council. The 25th CSP now has to react to this refusal in accordance with Article XII of the Convention. Germany calls upon all States Parties to adopt the draft CSP Decision "Addressing the Possession and use of Chemical Weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic".

The use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime has to stop once and for all and thus we call on those supporting the regime to live up to their responsibility and exercise their influence.

Mr. Chairman,

Any use of a chemical weapon is a matter of international concern and wholly contrary to international norms. This is why the use of a nerve agent against Alexej Navalny on 20 August in Russia threatens the integrity of the CWC and our common security.

Germany notes that the Russian Federation has asked the OPCW for Technical Assistance on this matter and calls upon the Russian Federation to fully cooperate with the OPCW and to disclose the circumstances of the chemical weapons attack against a Russian citizen on Russian territory. Germany strongly believes that there is no place for chemical weapons in the twenty-first century.

Mr. Chairman,

The Chemical Weapons Convention is a key instrument of the global non-proliferation and disarmament architecture. As its implementing body, the OPCW needs to build up its capacities continuously. The upgrade of the current OPCW Laboratory to a new Centre for Chemistry and Technology will be instrumental in fulfilling future OPCW tasks, not least in the field of training and capacity building for young scientists from all over the world. The ChemTech Centre will help the OPCW to keep pace with developments in science and technology and new chemical weapons threats. In 2020, Germany has therefore contributed 1,5 million Euro to the ChemTech Trust Fund. We note with satisfaction that over 40 States Parties from all regional groups, the European Union and three other donors have contributed to the ChemTech Trust Fund, confirming the broad ownership of this flagship project. Germany will continue to lend its support to this future cornerstone of the OPCW.

Our commitment to the CWC remains strong and our trust in its guardian, the OPCW, is unwavering. We look forward to continue cooperating with all States Parties, striving together for a world free of chemical weapons.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I request that this statement be circulated as an official document of the 25th Conference of the States Parties of the OPCW and published on the OPCW official webpage.