

The 25th Session of the Conference of the States Parties
General Debate
Statement by H.E. Ambassador Yeondoo Jeong
Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea to the OPCW

27 November 2020, The Hague

Mr. Chairperson,
Mr. Director-General,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

The Republic of Korea expresses its sincere congratulations to Ambassador Jose Antonio Zabalgoitia Trejo of Mexico on his assumption of the Chairpersonship of the 25th Session of the Conference of the States Parties. We have every confidence that this Session of the Conference will indeed prove a great success under his leadership. Korea assures him of its full support and cooperation for the success of the Conference.

Korea also wishes to extend its gratitude to the outgoing Chairperson, Ambassador Krassimir Kostov, for his tireless efforts as the Chair of the General Committee. His able stewardship has been instrumental in making it possible for us to gather again for this Session.

Director-General Fernando Arias and his able staff members should also be commended. Korea notes with appreciation their noble endeavors to fulfill their missions to the greatest extent possible even in the midst of the global pandemic. We pay tribute to their professionalism and devotion and reiterate our full support for the Director-General and the Technical Secretariat.

Mr. Chairperson,

Since the entry into force of the Chemical Weapons Convention in 1997, more than 98 percent of all declared chemical weapons have been destroyed and verified by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. The Organisation has also proved itself to be effective in meeting newly emerging challenges, including by adopting a milestone decision in November 2019 which added ‘Novichok’ nerve agents and other toxic chemicals into the list of the Schedule 1 chemicals.

The shared vision we embrace of a world free of chemical weapons and indeed the Convention itself are, however, being undermined by repeated chemical weapons use around the world, including in Syria, Malaysia, the United Kingdom, and Russia. On October 6, the OPCW confirmed yet another use of a nerve agent of the Novichok group against Mr. Alexei Navalny. The Government of the Republic of Korea notes with serious concern that a nerve agent was used as a chemical weapon to poison an individual in Russia. The Republic of Korea condemns in the strongest possible terms any use of chemical weapons - anywhere, at any time, by anyone under any circumstances. All those

responsible for chemical weapons use must be held accountable for their heinous crimes. This case must not be an exception.

We urge Russia, on whose territory the attack took place, to investigate and disclose in a swift and transparent manner the circumstances of this chemical weapons attack. We encourage Russia to cooperate with the Secretariat to resolve this matter and to share its findings with the OPCW.

Mr. Chairperson,

The Republic of Korea welcomes the adoption of the EC Decision EC-94/DEC.2 (9 July 2020), which we supported as one of the co-sponsors. The Decision was a responsible reaction by the Executive Council to the first report of the IIT, which concluded that there are reasonable grounds to believe that the Syrian Arab Air Force used sarin and chlorine as chemical weapons in three different Ltamenah incidents in March 2017.

Korea notes with grave concern the report on the implementation of the Decision dated 14 October by the Director-General, which states that Syria has not fulfilled its obligations under paragraph 5 of the Decision. Moreover, we are particularly concerned that the Syrian Arab Republic has neither cooperated with nor provided access to the IIT as required by Article VII of the Convention as well as United Nations Security Council Resolution 2118. We urge the Syrian Arab Republic to take all necessary measures to redress the situation in full cooperation with the Technical Secretariat without any delay.

Article VIII of the Convention stipulates that the Conference is the principal organ of the OPCW and that it has a rightful authority to oversee the implementation of the Convention. It is now incumbent upon the Conference to take a decisive action against this clear violation of norms against use of chemical weapons. Inaction will only embolden future perpetrators of chemical weapons. Korea urges all States Parties to work together to achieve tangible outcomes from this Session of the Conference.

The Republic of Korea reiterates its unwavering support for the OPCW Syria-related mechanisms, including the FFM, the DAT and the IIT. We note with appreciation that the three teams have continued to fulfill their mandates in a transparent, independent, and impartial way. We welcome that the Secretariat has partially resumed its operations in Syria, including the 23rd round of consultations with Syria and the 7th round of inspections of the SSRC. Korea pays tribute to the Secretariat for carrying out challenging duties even in the midst of COVID-19 and looks forward to the full resumption of its work in the near future.

Mr. Chairperson,

Korea believes that the current draft Programme and Budget for 2021 submitted by the Executive Council is proportionate and justified. The Secretariat must be equipped with available resources to

meet the range of challenges currently faced by the organisation. We note that the proposed budget for 2021 seeks to achieve maximum operational effectiveness whilst also taking into consideration restrictions faced as a result of COVID-19 the principle of zero nominal growth. It is our sincere hope that the Conference will indeed adopt the budget for 2021, enabling the OPCW to continue to fulfill its noble mandates.

Mr. Chairperson,

The reality is that the threats emanating from chemical weapons are constantly evolving. Against such a backdrop, the OPCW needs to keep pace with newly emerging challenges arising from scientific and technological developments. Korea is particularly concerned that central nervous system-acting chemicals could potentially be used as chemical weapons under the guise of law enforcement activities. It is high time that the policy-making organs of the OPCW took action to address this pressing matter. In this regard, Korea supports, as a co-sponsor, the draft Decision on Understanding Regarding the Aerosolized Use of Central Nervous System-Acting Chemicals for Law Enforcement Purposes. Korea encourages all States Parties to join in supporting the draft decision, which will be a meaningful step towards addressing our shared concerns.

Mr. Chairperson,

Since the establishment of the OPCW in 1997, universal adherence to the Convention has been an utmost priority for the organisation. Fully convinced that universality of the Convention is critical in ensuring full implementation of the Convention, Korea urges the four remaining States not Party to the Convention to ratify or accede to it as soon as possible without any preconditions. We would also like to request that the Technical Secretariat continue its efforts to achieve the universality at the earliest possible time.

Mr. Chairperson,

Korea extends its gratitude to the Technical Secretariat for their continuing efforts to accomplish their daunting tasks in the midst of COVID-19. We note with satisfaction, in particular, the progress on the Chem-Tech Centre project made by an able team of the Secretariat during the inter-sessional period. This future-oriented mission is truly vital in enabling the OPCW and the States Parties to meet and overcome new and evolving challenges. Recognizing this, Korea, as the first State Party to have provided voluntary contributions to this project in 2017, continues to make financial contributions on an annual basis. We are pleased to make contributions to this project of 100,000 USD this year. Given that there still is a need for further financial assistance for the project we call on all States Parties to pledge political and financial commitments for these valuable endeavors.

Mr. Chairperson,

Korea has always been playing an active part in furthering regional cooperation in the fields of chemical safety and security. In this vein, Korea has since 2012 been hosting with the OPCW the Seoul Workshop to help ensure chemical safety and security in the industrial sector in Asia. It is indeed unfortunate that in the midst of the pandemic, it was not possible to continue the Workshop this year. We look forward to welcoming relevant experts from the Asian region to the Workshop in 2021, providing a valuable opportunity for the sharing of knowledge and best practices in the field of chemical safety and security.

In closing, we request that this Statement be circulated as an official document of this Session of the Conference of the States Parties and be published on the OPCW website and external server.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson. /END/