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FRANCE

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR LUIS VASSY
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE FRENCH REPUBLIC TO THE OPCW
AT THE TWENTY-FIFTH SESSION
OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES**

Mr Chairperson,
Mr Director-General,
Distinguished Ambassadors,
Dear friends,

France aligns itself with the statement delivered by the European Union. Allow me to add the following remarks in my national capacity.

First of all, I would like to congratulate you on your election as Chairperson of this Conference of the States Parties (“the Conference”). The French delegation has full confidence in you to lead our discussions at a particularly important time for the OPCW.

This Conference is being held this year in a very special context: that of a global pandemic, which has been a source of upheaval, and prevents us from meeting as usual and forces us to adapt our working methods. The period we are going through makes us all the more aware of the need to work together on solutions to enable continuity in our work, even when it is impossible for us to meet physically. We encourage all initiatives and technical solutions in this regard.

In this difficult international context, another use of chemical weapons occurred, once more, in 2020. We deplore and strongly condemn this. Indeed, as you all know, on 20 August, a criminal act was perpetrated against a political opponent, Mr Alexei Navalny, on the territory of the Russian Federation. On 6 October, the analyses provided by the OPCW in the framework of its technical assistance visit to Germany confirmed the results of specialised German, Swedish, and French laboratories.

This assassination attempt by means of a military nerve agent of the “novichok” family, developed by Russia, is deeply worrisome. It takes place in the equally alarming context of the re-emergence of the use of chemical weapons. Many States, including France, have condemned in the strongest terms the appalling and irresponsible use of such an agent and have called on Russia to shed full light on the circumstances of this crime and on those who perpetrated it.

No credible explanation has yet been provided by Russia. We therefore consider that there is no other plausible explanation for Mr Navalny’s poisoning than Russian responsibility and involvement. Drawing conclusions from this finding, and in view of the continuing threat posed



by the proliferation and use of chemical weapons, the members of the Council of the European Union have decided to impose restrictive measures against six persons and one entity which, considering their functions and activities, could only have been involved in the assassination attempt against Alexei Navalny.

As the Director-General of the OPCW noted in his statement to the Executive Council (“the Council”) in October, any poisoning of an individual through the use of a nerve agent is considered as a use of chemical weapons under the Chemical Weapons Convention (“the Convention”). Twenty-seven years ago, all of us, States Parties, agreed to exclude the possibility of their use, in the interest of humanity as a whole. We cannot today tolerate their re-emergence. In the name of collective security, we therefore reiterate our call on Russia to provide without delay clarification on this assassination attempt.

The Syrian chemical dossier, despite the remarkable work of the Director-General and his teams in recent years, is once again on the agenda of our Conference.

You are already aware of my country’s commitment to the fight against impunity for the use of chemical weapons. Indeed, we cannot allow this situation to compromise the full implementation of the Convention and thus our collective security. On the contrary, we must remain united, defend it tirelessly and prevent any further use of these weapons. In this regard, by adopting the decision put forward by my delegation on behalf of 40 States Parties at its Ninety-Fourth Session in July, the Council acted within the framework of the mandate given to it by the Conference at its special session in June 2018.

Following the release of the first report of the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT), this Council decision precisely defined the measures to be completed to bring Syria into compliance with its obligations, requesting the Director-General to submit a report on the implementation of these measures at the end of the set deadline.

On October 14, the Director-General informed all States Parties that Syria had not taken the necessary measures to comply with its obligations. This is deeply worrying and characteristic of Syria’s lack of cooperation with the OPCW, since the adoption of United Nations Security Council resolution 2118 more than seven years ago. In accordance with the decision adopted in July, the review of the situation is now a matter for consideration by the Conference. The Convention is clear: in these circumstances, Article XII provides that the Conference may suspend the rights and privileges of the State Party concerned.

That is why we propose that the Conference take action on a draft decision aimed at setting out consequences for Syria’s alarming behaviour. I therefore have the honour to inform you that 46 States Parties to the Convention, from four regional groups, have become co-sponsors of this draft decision, as they believe that the report of the IIT and Syria’s refusal to redress the situation cannot and must not remain unanswered. The draft submitted for consideration by the Conference therefore proposes to suspend Syria’s rights and privileges within the policy-making organs until Syria resolves the situation. It is thus a fundamentally balanced draft decision that respects the procedures of our Organisation, and is not confrontational, despite the seriousness of the facts established by the IIT. We call on you to support this draft decision in order to demonstrate our collective commitment to the fight against impunity. The adoption of this decision is a first step in the process that will allow, in forums outside the OPCW, to bring justice to the thousands of people who have been victims of the use of chemical weapons.

We cannot emphasise it enough: the OPCW is a fundamental pillar of our collective security. That is why it is our duty to support the Organisation's efforts by adopting the Draft Programme and Budget for 2021, as presented by the Director-General, so that the OPCW is able to carry out the missions we have entrusted to it, as of 1 January 2021.

France would like to commend the excellent work accomplished by the co-facilitators, Mr Marcin Kawalowski and Mr Matteo Fachinotti prior to the Council session in October, which led to the Council's recommendation to adopt the Draft Programme and Budget for 2021. We also look forward to the forthcoming construction of the new Centre for Chemistry and Technology, which will become a world reference in this field and a training platform for Member States, for the benefit of international cooperation and, of course, our collective security.

I would like to reaffirm France's full confidence in the work of the Technical Secretariat and its Director-General, who work daily to carry out the Organisation's missions, with the sole objective of ensuring compliance with the Convention.

In conclusion, in view of the alarming developments we are facing today, it seems all the more essential to provide the OPCW with the budgetary means necessary to implement its mandate, in particular to prevent the re-emergence of the use of chemical weapons. France therefore supports all of the budgetary decisions submitted for consideration by this Conference.

I would ask that this statement be considered as an official document of this session of the Conference and posted on the official website of the OPCW.

Thank you.

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