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SWITZERLAND

**STATEMENT BY H.E. HEINZ WALKER-NEDERKOORN
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SWISS CONFEDERATION
TO THE OPCW AT THE TWENTY-FIFTH SESSION
OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES**

Mr Chairperson,

Chemical weapons continue to represent a serious threat to international and human security. It is essential that the universal prohibition of these weapons is upheld and that all States that have not yet acceded to the Chemical Weapons Convention (“the Convention”) do so as soon as possible. It is also fundamental that all States Parties abide by the rules and fully comply with the provisions of the Convention.

Over the past eight years, the prohibition of chemical weapons has been challenged by their repeated use. Switzerland condemns in the strongest possible terms any use of chemical weapons by any actor and underlines once again that their use is reprehensible, violates international law, and is prohibited to all actors, at all times, and under all circumstances.

The use of a nerve agent of the “novichok” group in the attack against Alexei Navalny, as confirmed by the German authorities and the OPCW, is of grave concern. The Convention was violated on Russian territory by the use of a military-grade nerve agent. The fact that chemicals of the novichok group are circulating on Russian territory raises a number of very serious questions and we expect Russia to provide detailed explanations in this regard. Switzerland once again calls on the Russian Federation to conduct a comprehensive and transparent investigation. Those responsible must be held accountable.

The first report of the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) convincingly concluded that there are reasonable grounds to believe that the perpetrators of the use of sarin on 24 and 30 March 2017, and of chlorine on 25 March 2017 in the town of Ltamenah, Syria, were individuals belonging to the Syrian Arab Air Force.

We must condemn these flagrant and repeated violations of the Convention by the Syrian Arab Republic and take action. Concrete measures are necessary to deter and end the use of chemical weapons and to hold those responsible to account. My Government, therefore, highly welcomes the steps that have been taken by the Executive Council (“the Council”) in response to the IIT’s findings.

However, as the Director-General reported, the Syrian Arab Republic has not met the demands of the Council as stipulated in decision EC-94/DEC.2. This situation is of deep concern and



Switzerland therefore fully supports the draft decision on “Addressing the Possession and Use of Chemical Weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic”. We call on the Syrian Arab Republic to comply fully with its obligations under the Convention.

Switzerland continues to have full confidence in the competent and impartial work undertaken by the Director-General and the Technical Secretariat, be it in the framework of the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM), the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT), or the IIT, which are carrying out essential work with a view to stopping the use of chemical weapons in Syria and ensuring compliance with international law.

In order to ensure the OPCW’s effectiveness, we must continue to support the Organisation both politically and financially. This is why my Government fully endorses the Draft Programme and Budget for 2021.

Switzerland is convinced that it is necessary to affirm States Parties’ understanding that the aerosolised use of central nervous system-acting chemicals (CNS-acting chemicals) is inconsistent with law enforcement as a “purpose not prohibited” under the Convention, in order to safeguard the integrity of the Convention and prevent the weakening of the global norm against chemical weapons. Switzerland thanks the many States Parties that support our joint initiative. The co-sponsors have tabled a revised draft decision of the Council that addresses many of the questions and concerns raised by delegations in our consultations with States Parties. I invite all States Parties to join the group of supporting countries working to eliminate the risks posed by the aerosolised use of CNS-acting chemicals for law enforcement purposes.

Thank you.

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