



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
(The Hague, 20-22 April 2021)

Agenda item 9(d) – Addressing the Threat from Chemical Weapons Use

Mr. Chairperson,

I have asked to take the floor on behalf of the European Union (EU).

The European Union reiterates its strong concerns that the Russian Federation has not reacted to international calls to thoroughly and transparently investigate the assassination attempt on Mr. Alexei Navalny who was poisoned in Russia by a chemical nerve agent of the “Novichok” group in August 2020. The poisoning has been confirmed, without doubt, by specialised laboratories in Germany, France and Sweden, as well as by the OPCW.

Furthermore, the European Union was disconcerted by the withdrawal on 16 December 2020 of Russia’s request for a Technical Assistance Visit despite the readiness of the OPCW Technical Secretariat to deploy its experts in order to help clarify the case.

The European Union once again urges the Russian Federation to disclose and credibly explain the circumstances of the assassination attempt in full transparency and without further delay, in accordance with the obligations defined in Article VII of the Chemical Weapons Convention, which urges all States Parties not to permit in any place under its control any activity prohibited by the Convention.

Impunity for the use of chemical weapons must not and will not be tolerated. Those responsible for the assassination attempt on Mr. Navalny must be brought to justice. 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 inducing and providing support to the poisoning of Alexei Navalny with the Novichok nerve agent.

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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Mr. Chairperson,

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, Liechtenstein 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,

Accountability is essential to prevent the re-emergence of chemical weapons. 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 European Union is committed, at the highest level, to supporting the OPCW in its efforts to implement the decision of the Fourth Special Session of the Conference of States Parties in June 2018, which put in place arrangements to identify the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic and the consequent establishment of the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team (IIT).

The European Union reiterates its full confidence in the professionalism, impartiality and independence of the OPCW Technical Secretariat and underlines the OPCW complementarity with the work of the United Nations. In this context, recalling the UNSC Resolution 2118 (2013) and the UNGA Resolution A/RES/75/265 of 8 March 2021, the European Union appreciates the regular sharing of information of the OPCW activities and investigations with the United Nations Secretary-General and the UN Security Council regarding the Syrian Chemical Weapons Programme.

Mr. Chairperson,

The European Union strongly condemns the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian Arab Air Force as concluded by the IIT in its report to the OPCW Executive Council and to the Secretary General of the United Nations on 8 April 2020. The IIT's findings represent an important step in efforts to end impunity for the use of chemical weapons.

The European Union welcomes the release of the second IIT report on 12 April 2021 and is determined to ensure full follow up of its findings. For its part, the European Union has already imposed restrictive measures on five high-level Syrian officials and scientists and one 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 on national as well as international levels towards ensuring accountability for those responsible for these egregious crimes. The European Union continues to demonstrate its commitment to strengthen collective efforts to ensure accountability of perpetrators for chemical attacks through the International Partnership Against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons.

Mr Chairperson,

In response to the findings of the first 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 dated 9 July 2020). In accordance with the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), 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 Convention.

On 14 October 2020, the OPCW Director-General informed all States Parties (ref. EC-96/DG.1) that Syria had not taken the necessary measures to comply with its obligations. This is characteristic of Syria's lack of cooperation with the OPCW since the adoption of the United Nations Security Council resolution 2118 more than seven years ago.

The review of the situation is now a matter for consideration by the Conference. The Convention is clear: in these circumstances, Article XII of the Convention provides that the Conference may suspend the rights and privileges of the State Party concerned, as recommended by the EC in its decision EC-94/DEC.2 dated 9 July 2020.

Syria's refusal to redress the situation cannot and must not remain unanswered. The European Union and its Member States therefore consider that the draft Decision suspending Syria's rights and privileges (C-25/DEC/CRP.10, dated 25 November 2020) is an appropriate response by the Conference to the clear violation of the core principles of the Convention. The draft Decision is co-sponsored by 46 States Parties.

The European Union urges all States Parties to live up to their responsibility to protect the integrity of the Convention, and to support the adoption of the draft Decision.

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