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URUGUAY

**STATEMENT BY THE DELEGATION OF THE EASTERN REPUBLIC OF
URUGUAY TO THE OPCW AT THE TWENTY-FIFTH SESSION
OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES**

Mr Chairperson, Ambassador José Antonio Zabalgoitia,

I would like to express my sincere congratulations on your election as Chairperson of the Twenty-Fifth Session of the Conference of the States Parties and assure you of the traditional support of my delegation for the work that will be taking place at the heart of this Conference.

At the same time, we welcome the preparation done by the outgoing Chairperson, Ambassador Krassimir Kostov, who led the meetings of the General Committee this past year, which Uruguay attended as a Vice-Chairperson.

The Eastern Republic of Uruguay, as an original signatory to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction, and as one of the first countries to ratify it, reiterates its strongest possible commitment thereto, as well as to the policies of disarmament and non-proliferation, and to the fundamental principles of the United Nations, in particular the preservation of international peace and security and the peaceful resolution of disputes.

Uruguay strongly condemns the use of chemical weapons anywhere, under any circumstances, and by anyone, as it constitutes a flagrant violation of international law, and especially of the Chemical Weapons Convention. We deeply regret that the use of toxic chemicals as weapons continues. We therefore call upon the States Parties concerned to investigate every incident in an impartial and credible manner and to request the technical assistance of the OPCW with the aim of clarifying the facts and identifying the perpetrators of said use.

We are concerned by the compelling conclusions of the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) as set out in its first report (S/1867/2020, dated 8 April 2020) regarding three incidents in Ltamenah (Syrian Arab Republic) that took place in March 2017 and which affirm, based on factual evidence, that there are reasonable grounds to believe that the perpetrators of the use of sarin and chlorine as chemical weapons were individuals belonging to the Syrian Arab Air Force (as determined by the use of military air transport departing from two Government airbases: al Shayrat and Hama). Said use of chemical weapons is something that is unacceptable, even within the context of a domestic or international armed conflict such as the one that has affected this country; this only intensifies the urgent need to clarify the discrepancies and omissions in Syria's initial and additional declarations of its stockpiles and



facilities since its accession to the Organisation as a State Party in 2013, based on the information exchanged within the framework of the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) or corroborated on-site on technical missions.

We support the professional and impartial work that the IIT continues to carry out in line with its mandate and international standards, established by the decision issued at the Fourth Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties, entitled “Addressing the Threat from Chemical Weapons Use” (C-SS-4/DEC.3, dated 27 June 2018), and which now serves as a guaranteed technical body. We also welcome the work of the Fact-Finding Mission in Syria (FFM), which just issued two reports in October 2020 on the incidents that took place in Aleppo 2018, and in Saraqib in 2016. We call upon States Parties to support the IIT, the mandate of which not only concerns Syria and verification capabilities, but also paragraphs 18, 20, and 21(C-SS-4/DEC.3), which address use by non-State actors, prevention, and response to chemical security incidents involving prohibited use, and requests for assistance by a State Party to investigate an incident on its territory.

Additionally, Uruguay expresses its concern regarding the confirmation of the most recent use of chemical weapons, according to the release of the “Summary of the Report on Activities Carried Out in Support of a Request for Technical Assistance by Germany (Technical Assistance Visit – TAV/01/20)” (S/1906/2020, dated 6 October 2020). We urge all States Parties to cooperate with the Technical Secretariat in order to clarify this regrettable incident.

In this regard, we reiterate the importance of continued support for this multilateral forum and the work of the OPCW Technical Secretariat towards meeting all of the objectives set out in the Convention.

For this reason, Mr Chairperson, Uruguay supports the approval of the OPCW’s Programme and Budget for 2021 and the use of the cash surplus from prior years, while welcoming once again the efficient efforts to maintain the contributions of the States Parties at zero nominal growth in the coming year, as we are mindful that this will not remain sustainable in future.

We emphasise the initiative to strengthen institutional scientific and technical capabilities and, concurrently, the possibility of supporting the national needs of the States Parties, among other things, via the future Centre for Chemistry and Technology (ChemTech Centre).

Uruguay underscores the importance of cooperation in chemistry under the appropriate security conditions, including the strengthening of the national capacities of laboratories and authorities to ensure the adequate and integrated management of chemicals, which requires a synergy-based approach to working towards sustainable development with other international bodies, not just within the field of disarmament and non-proliferation, but also with other associated bodies, such as the World Customs Organization (WCO), the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and in particular, requires agreements related to chemistry with provisions that cover international transfers, such as the conventions of Basel, Rotterdam, Stockholm, and Minamata on mercury, as well as the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM), which promotes the sustainable use of chemicals.

Uruguay recognises that the exceptional circumstances stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic have hindered the normal development of a variety of activities in cooperation and the exchange of knowledge and experience, and we welcome the efforts of the Secretariat to make equal progress using virtual formats, as was the case for the Meeting of National

Authorities that took place on 23 and 24 November. We do hope that we can soon return to in-person activities once the health situation permits.

The delegation of Uruguay would especially like to thank the Chairperson of the Executive Council, Ambassador Agustín Vásquez Gómez of El Salvador, and his predecessor Ambassador Andrea Perugini, as well as the various facilitators and chairpersons of working groups, for their dedication and efforts to address and search for ways to make constructive progress on the various issues under the Convention, serving as a nexus between the States Parties and the different areas of the Technical Secretariat. In this regard, we renew our commitment to working as a co-facilitator together with Ambassador Matthew Neuhaus of Australia in accordance with the mandate received this year from the Executive Council on the matter of governance. We will look for a way to meet institutional needs with certain flexibilities concerning the strict tenure policy at the OPCW, while valuing the importance of ensuring that the Organisation has capable, experienced personnel and ensuring that the composition thereof reflects as accurately as possible the diversity of its membership from a geographical standpoint, while also pursuing gender parity.

Finally, Uruguay, while renewing its support for the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons as a multilateral guarantee of the destruction of chemical weapons and their non-proliferation, calls upon all States Parties to carry out the legal obligations that they accepted under the Convention, encouraging work in pursuit of its universality and the aim of a world free of chemical weapons.

Uruguay requests that this national statement be considered an official document of the Twenty-Fifth Session of the Conference of the States Parties and published on the Organisation's website and external server.

Thank you.

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