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RUSSIAN FEDERATION

**STATEMENT BY THE DELEGATION OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION
TO THE OPCW AT THE TWENTY-FIFTH SESSION
OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES**

On behalf of the Russian delegation, we would like to congratulate José Antonio Zabalgoitia Trejo, the distinguished Permanent Representative of Mexico, on his election as the Chairperson of the Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention and assure him of our willingness to cooperate constructively to ensure that the Conference is as productive as possible. Please allow me to also thank Krassimir Kostov, the distinguished Permanent Representative of Bulgaria, and Director-General Fernando Arias for their great work in organising and preparing today's event.

This session is taking place under the extraordinary conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic. It affects everyone, including our Organisation, which has to hold its most important meetings in a truncated format and essentially with the absence of delegates from the capitals.

In this regard, we find it unacceptable to raise the initiative to have a number of States Parties authorise third parties to participate in the Conference on their behalf. This is a corrupt practice. It is not provided for in the Rules of Procedure, and does not meet the principle of inclusivity, or the involvement of States Parties in the decision-making process at this forum. We would draw attention to the fact that this is, moreover, unacceptable under conditions in which decisions are to be taken at the session of a managing body—decisions with far-reaching political, financial, economic, and other consequences for the Organisation's activities.

The work within the framework of the Convention continues. Summing up the results of the outgoing year, we note with deep regret that the crisis that emerged within the OPCW several years ago is gradually becoming systemic. As a cancerous tumour, it corrodes all areas of the OPCW's work, undermining the efforts to universalise the Convention as well as the trust in the Organisation as a vanguard of the non-proliferation of chemical weapons and disarmament. The over-the-top politicisation of many agenda items, the trampling of the principle of consensus, the forcing-through of issues outside the legal scope of the Convention, and the blurring of the OPCW mandate to serve the political interests of certain countries and their geopolitical ambitions are not mere episodes, but everyday trends.

The examples of such are numerous. Particularly blatant were the cases in which the Organisation—one of the most important elements of the global security system for many years—was drawn into political games involving unabashed provocations. The Syrian Arab Republic has been targeted for a long time, but recently such approaches have been applied to Russia—suffice it to mention the events in Salisbury and the most recent gamble with Mr Navalny.



In our view, the unbridled campaign concerning the so-called poisoning of the Russian blogger and related efforts by Germany and its Euro-Atlantic allies on the platform of the OPCW demonstrate their intention to use this international organisation to exert political and punitive pressure on the Russian Federation.

Evidently, someone got the idea to repeat the “success” of the United Kingdom in inciting Russophobia with the so-called Skripal case. The fake story initially launched by Germany of the alleged poisoning of Mr Navalny in Russia by some exotic “novichok”—against the backdrop of Russian doctors saving his life in Omsk and his rapid departure to Berlin for treatment—cannot withstand any criticism of common sense. The subsequent events are beyond all bounds in a civilised society. Instead of trying to look into what had happened, Germany and its allies resorted to megaphone diplomacy by unleashing a massive disinformation campaign against Russia, and started to demand some kind of “independent international investigation” under the auspice of the OPCW.

But it was just a verbal propagandistic stunt. In reality, the German Government had immediately started to actively counteract Russia’s pre-investigation assessment of the situation with Mr Navalny, obstructing the establishment of the truth. The evidence is its utter refusal to cooperate with Russian law enforcement and medical institutions, its blatant disregard for—or formal replies to—what already amount to five requests from the Office of the Prosecutor General of the Russian Federation submitted in accordance with the 1959 European Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters and the two Additional Protocols thereto.

Berlin committed a direct violation of the norms under the Convention. How else can one qualify Germany’s unwillingness to fulfil its obligations under Articles VII and IX of the Convention, which clearly stipulate that States Parties shall afford each other legal assistance, and make every effort to clarify, through exchange of information and consultations among themselves, any matter which may be considered ambiguous?

The German side classified the information on the substance allegedly found in Mr Navalny’s samples. But according to the conclusions of the OPCW Technical Secretariat on the outcome of the technical assistance provided to Germany, it is not subject to control under the Convention. Does Berlin really not understand the absurdity of such behaviour? We would recall that after the events in Salisbury and Amesbury, the States Parties undertook steps without delay to ban new lethal substances, adding them to the appropriate Schedules. But in this case they tell us: we know—but will tell no one—which dangerous “novichok” we have detected. If Germany, along with France and Sweden, which also conducted relevant investigations, were really concerned about strengthening the Convention, they would have informed not only Russia, but also the OPCW, of their findings immediately. But if they have nothing to show, then all this hype is just blatant provocation in the worst traditions of a “hybrid war”. There is only one clearly positive thing: Mr Navalny is alive and healthy and is resting, as we understand, in Germany.

The Secretariat was also not up to scratch in the scheme of things. It could not give answers to Russia’s legitimate questions, hiding behind the guise of the policy on confidentiality. Who, if not the Secretariat, should have carefully hinted to the German side that it is counterproductive to classify detailed data on the analysis of Mr Navalny’s samples and is inconsistent with the letter and spirit of the Convention, especially in light of Russia’s request for technical assistance? Only a comparison of the results of the analyses conducted by our countries will lead to the truth.

Everything taking place around this quasi-mystery is perplexing and makes us wonder: are we dealing with the same Organisation that its founding fathers envisaged and created, and are we witnessing a cardinal shift in its paradigm?

Another deep divide within the OPCW that is unsettling to everyone is, without a doubt, attribution. The decision forced through by a vote in June 2018 granting the Secretariat the authority to identify the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons is absolutely unlawful. This innovation is outside the Organisation's mandate, it goes beyond the scope of the Convention, and it infringes upon the exclusive competence of the United Nations Security Council.

The first conclusions of the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) regarding the events in Ltamenah on 24, 25, and 30 March 2017 were no revelation to us, or likely to the majority of OPCW members. There was no doubt that the IIT was created with only goal: to serve as an instrument of pressure against undesirable Member States—primarily Syria. The ultimatum-style decision taken by the Executive Council last July, which contained deliberately impossible conditions, was evidence of that. Another dangerous precedent was set when dubious politicised conclusions such as “there are reasonable grounds to believe” made by an illegitimate structure are taken for granted without discussion and are simply “rubber-stamped” through a decision of the Organisation's policy-making body. The authors of this action deliberately refused to use the mechanisms set out in the Convention to address the concerns, in particular those mentioned in Article IX of the Convention. And now they are trying to steamroll within the OPCW the decision to deprive Syria of its rights and privileges, which is absolutely unacceptable and simply shatters the faith in the Organisation, ruining any prospects for its universalisation. Which of the countries that are still on the sidelines will want to join the OPCW if it is turning into a kangaroo court for its Member States?

In spite of the difficulties caused by its bloody war, Syria completely destroyed, under strict international control, the stockpiles of chemical weapons in its possession and continues to diligently cooperate with the Secretariat in the framework of the mechanisms set out in the Convention. This is evidenced by the progress made in verifying the initial declaration of the Syrian Arab Republic under the Convention. The relevant special mission and the Syrian side have done a tremendous job in this area. The Syrian authorities are taking unprecedented measures to ensure transparency in the provision of documentation and additional declarations of past activities. However, it is necessary to realise that after so many years—and under the conditions of a drawn-out armed conflict—Damascus is not able to provide supporting information for part of the claims. As we see it, the Secretariat also has its failings, as in the case of the loss of the samples collected in Syria in October 2019. There are precedents from the past, when the Secretariat was not able to confirm the number of chemical weapons that had been destroyed or “evaporated” in one State Party or another. Nevertheless, exceptions were made and those issues were closed. In Syria's case, we should be realistic and remove “outstanding” issues from the agenda, as such a state of affairs cannot last forever. But to do so would require a political will that we have yet to observe.

Russia has repeatedly spoken about the need for a fundamental reform of the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) in Syria. We tirelessly repeat the demand to put an end to “office-based investigations”, carried out without visiting the sites of incidents and the direct collection of samples by inspectors, and without following the proper chain of custody procedure, and relying on biased NGOs funded by Damascus's adversaries. The outrageous case that was uncovered of rigging the results of investigations into the events in Douma will remain a blot on the history of the OPCW. The politically motivated report, custom-made to justify the

missile strike on Syria by Washington, London, and Paris without any trial and in violation of the United Nations Charter, seriously damaged the reputation of the OPCW.

We cannot remain silent about the scandalous double standards in the work of this structure: the investigations of incidents reported by the Syrian Government, unlike those declared by the opposition, are protracted and for some reason do not confirm the facts of the use of chemical weapons by terrorists. A perfect example of such is the fruitless two-year investigation into the chemical attack in Aleppo committed by rebels on 24 November 2018. We are deeply concerned by the fact that the Secretariat did not find the information submitted by two Member States convincing. Such conclusions are beneficial only for those who continue, with impunity, to use chemicals for military purposes.

We condemn the threat of the use of chemical weapons by anyone, including with regard to civilian facilities. Likewise, we reject the use of any hazardous chemicals, including white phosphorus.

We are extremely disappointed by the process this year of agreeing on the Draft OPCW Programme and Budget for 2021. We categorically oppose the imposition upon Member States, against their will, of financial obligations in connection with the illegitimate activities of the attribution mechanism. We regret to state that certain Members of the Organisation, while ignoring opinions of other delegations, try to secure their own interests by forcing through the “omnibus” version of the financial document that others find unacceptable. And the Secretariat unfortunately plays a destructive, rather than constructive, role as the sponsor of the draft. We understand the critical importance of preparing the Organisation’s budget; however, we do not accept the use of corrupt methods to achieve that goal.

We also have to mention the disruptive role that the United States has been playing in the life of the OPCW in recent years. It is seen both in the big picture—as addressed above—and the smaller details. As for the latter, we recall Washington’s attempts to politicise the activity of the Advisory Body on Administrative and Financial Matters (ABAF). The nomination and dismissal of national candidates to this structure is the prerogative of the respective Member State, which is consistent with the best practices of other international organisations. However, at the whim of the United States’ delegation, the ABAF’s work has been blocked for two years (no reports have been adopted). The removal of the Russian expert from the ABAF at the initiative of the United States was a flagrant infringement upon the independence of this body’s activities.

An equally representative example of the shattering of the OPCW’s pillars is the persistent steamrolling by the United States of the ban on the use of aerosolised central nervous system-acting chemicals for law enforcement purposes. On this issue, the Americans are hiding behind the backs of their co-sponsors, but everyone knows full well that they are the main driver behind that erroneous initiative. If we start to implement the Convention based on some “understandings” beyond its legal norms and principles, sooner or later it will become just a blank piece of paper. Certain Member States should not be deluded by the assurances of the proponents that their obligations would not increase. They would feel the exact opposite just as soon as it fit the political motives for them to do so.

As a State that stood at the source of the development of the Convention, the Russian Federation believes that the earliest possible destruction of chemical weapons stockpiles around the entire world is a key task. That is why our country fulfilled its obligations under the Convention three years ahead of the deadline, having destroyed the world’s largest stockpile

of 40,000 tonnes. Today, only the United States possesses declared chemical weapons stockpiles. We call on our American partners to follow our example and accelerate the destruction of their declared stockpiles as much as possible to complete this process ahead of the established deadline.

We are convinced that all the problems identified here can be resolved through the political will of the Member States and the unbiased and impartial approach of the OPCW Secretariat. It requires abandoning, finally, the path of fanning the fires of confrontation, the politicisation of the essentially technical work of the Organisation, and restoring its unity and the priority of consensus in the decision-making process. We are ready to do that.

In conclusion, we would like to assure you, Mr Chairperson, of our unwavering support for and commitment to constructive work. We request that this statement be circulated as an official document of the Twenty-Fifth Session of the Conference and published on the Organisation's extranet and website.

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