

## **UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

### **STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR JOSEPH MANSO PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE OPCW NINETY-SIXTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr. Chairperson, Mr. Director-General, Distinguished Ambassadors and Delegates,

We gather today a year into the ongoing difficult circumstances of the global COVID-19 pandemic. The United States has lost half a million souls to COVID-19. We express our deepest sympathies for the loss of life that has impacted all our nations. As the world continues to grapple with the ongoing impacts of the pandemic, and many experience lasting consequences of the virus, we express our gratitude to the Director-General and Technical Secretariat for adapting in ways that allow the OPCW to safely continue its essential work and convene today for the ninety-sixth session of the Executive Council.

This Organization, created to relegate the tragic legacy of chemical weapons to the past, must continue its critically important efforts. We had all hoped that the entry-into-force of the Chemical Weapons Convention in 1997 would be such a transformative event that only the routine work of implementation would remain. Nearly a quarter of a century later, the reality is that the OPCW and the Convention are under threat more than ever before.

Let me recount for you an alarming event to prove my point: a Novichok nerve agent was recklessly used as a tool of attempted assassination. Despite the fact that the production and use of this deadly agent is forbidden under the Chemical Weapons Convention, a State Party to the Convention – the Russian Federation – was responsible for this heinous attack.

Nor was this, shockingly, the first such incident. The sad reality is that this body had a similar discussion three years ago following the Novichok attack in Salisbury, when Russian security services used a Novichok nerve agent in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland against a citizen of the United Kingdom, Mr. Sergei Skripal, and his Russian citizen daughter, Yulia Skripal. As we mark the third anniversary of that attack, we are forced to acknowledge that, sadly, and despite the condemnation, outrage, and actions taken to respond to Russia's use of a chemical weapon in Salisbury, we are faced with yet another egregious Russian attack using a Novichok nerve agent.

As you all know, the United States has determined that officers from Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) used a novel nerve agent to poison Mr. Navalny. Russia's use of a chemical weapon to poison Mr. Navalny was a reprehensible act the United States and many other nations have forcefully condemned. There is no plausible explanation for Mr. Navalny's poisoning other than Russian government involvement and responsibility. Further, there now is a robust body of publicly available evidence of the Russian government's attempted assassination of Mr. Navalny, as chronicled in detail by several investigative news outlets, and even by Mr. Navalny's own courageous efforts to out his would-be killers. The now-detailed understanding of how Russian security agents tracked and attempted to kill Mr. Navalny – read and viewed by millions of people around the world – lays bare the absurdity of the Russian state's disinformation campaign.

Predictably, as evidenced in the exchange of letters between Russia and the Director-General, Russia has canceled the OPCW's request for a Technical Assistance Visit (TAV) at the same time that it refuses to conduct a thorough and transparent investigation of its own. There can be no doubt here: Russia's repeated use of Novichok agents, first against the Skripals in 2018 and now against Mr. Navalny, is a clear violation of the Convention and a threat to international security.

President Biden has indicated the United States will act firmly in defense of our national interests in response to actions by Russia that harm us or our allies, and we have done so. On March 2, the United States took action against the Russian Federation for its use of a chemical weapon against Aleksey Navalny and for his arrest and imprisonment. The United States imposed sanctions and other measures on Russia to send a clear signal that the use of chemical weapons has severe consequences. The United States has also established visa restrictions that prohibit entry into the United States by Russian nationals who are responsible for assassination attempts using chemical weapons and other individuals significantly involved in Russia's chemical weapons program. We have coordinated these actions with our EU partners and the UK.

Let us be clear: the use of chemical weapons, anywhere, at any time, by anyone, under any circumstances, is entirely unacceptable. The United States once again calls on Russia – as we did in 2018 and have continued to do so since – to join the responsible nations of the world and comply with its international obligations. Russia must fully declare and eliminate its chemical weapons program.

In response to the many challenges facing this Organization, the United States and likeminded States Parties continue to work together to reinforce the norm against chemical weapons use and to seek measures that inhibit future use. Before us during this Executive Council session is a decision that underscores the continuing importance of the Convention in addressing evolving security challenges. To that end, the United States and numerous co-sponsors support adopting a decision recommending to the November 2021 Conference of the States Parties that it affirm that the use of aerosolized Central Nervous System (CNS)-acting chemicals is inconsistent with law enforcement as a “purpose not prohibited” by the Convention.

The revised draft before the Council includes additional language following the extensive consultations that have taken place over the last year. Without altering the original core purpose of the decision, the changes clarify and help ensure that States Parties will remain well informed about how relevant scientific knowledge develops in the future. The draft does not propose any new legal obligations on States Parties. Furthermore, the Technical Secretariat has also determined the decision will not incur any financial, administrative, or program and budget implications. By having the Conference of the States Parties memorialize the understanding of States Parties on this application of the Convention, we are making clear that countries cannot hide their work to advance an offensive capability regarding aerosolized CNS-acting chemicals under the guise of doing so for law enforcement as a “purpose not prohibited” under the Convention. It is imperative this Council take action to address these agents and remove any ambiguity that may exist regarding these chemicals.

The United States looks forward to Part II of the Twenty-fifth session of the Conference of the States Parties, where member states will take additional action in response to the July 2020 EC decision on “Addressing the Possession and Use of Chemical Weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic.” The Assad regime’s repeated chemical weapons attacks have remained unanswered for too long. When faced with the heinous use of chemical weapons, States Parties have a responsibility to condemn these acts and take action to support the norm against chemical weapons use. We must not allow those States Parties that have repeatedly used these deplorable weapons in violation of the Convention to erode the norm against chemical weapons use. Responsible nations must not stay silent. We must continue our efforts to support the OPCW in its difficult work on attribution.

As Winston Churchill said to the House of Commons in 1948, “Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it.” The Russian Federation used a Novichok nerve agent in an assassination attempt in 2018, and then again in 2020. Will Russia continue to use these heinous weapons? The Assad regime has used chlorine barrel bombs and sarin gas against its own people repeatedly during the Syrian civil war. When will it stop? The use of chemical weapons must not occur with impunity. CWC States Parties must demonstrate a resolute response to such acts if we truly aspire to relegate these inhumane weapons of war to the annals of history. States Parties must uphold the norm against chemical weapons use and – for the sake of our collective peace and security – bring chemical weapons use to zero.

I ask that this statement be designated an official document of this Council session and posted on both the external server and the public website.