

STATEMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF AUSTRIA
DELIVERED BY H.E. AMBASSADOR ASTRID HARZ
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF AUSTRIA TO THE OPCW
AT THE 97th SESSION OF THE OPCW EXECUTIVE COUNCIL
(The Hague, 6-9 JULY 2021)

Mr. Chairperson,
Mr. Director-General,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Austria is fully aligned with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union by the Ambassador of Slovenia, Ms Sanja Štiglic. I would nevertheless like to make a few additional remarks in our national capacity.

Austria welcomes the appointment of Ambassador Abdelouahab Bellouki as Chairperson of the Executive Council. We look forward to continue working with him in the spirit of constructive cooperation towards our shared goals. We would also like to thank the Director-General and the staff of the Technical Secretariat for their hard work and their continuing dedication to the OPCW in these challenging times.

Mr. Chairperson,

On 12 April, the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team published its second report. This report found that the Syrian Arab Air Force was responsible for the use of chemical weapons in Saraqib in the Syrian Arab Republic on 4 February 2018. This is the second report that clearly attributes responsibility for the use of chemical weapons to the Syrian Arab Republic. In this light, the Conference of States Parties had the responsibility to react to these breaches of the convention by adopting decision C-25/DEC.9 on “Addressing the Possession and Use of Chemical Weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic”. Austria fully supports this important decision and we do call on the Syrian Arab Republic to fully implement both this decision as well as all its obligations under the CWC. In this context, we are particularly worried about reports that the SAR is obstructing the work of the OPCW Declaration Assessment Team. We call on the Syrian authorities to do the opposite, to start fully and transparently cooperating with the DAT on all issues.

The assassination attempt on the Russian citizen Alexei Navalny is yet another shocking use of a military chemical nerve agent of the “Novichok” group that has to be condemned in the strongest terms. Such a use of chemical weapons is absolutely unacceptable. We continue to call on the Russian Federation to ensure an impartial and transparent investigation in cooperation with the OPCW.

Mr. Chairperson,

One of the issues on the agenda of this session of the Executive Council is the approval of a facility agreement between the OPCW and Austria for a facility for protective purposes located in Seibersdorf Austria. The Seibersdorf lab has been cooperating with the Austrian authorities and other international organizations for a long time and possesses extensive experience in the CBRN field. The aim of the facility agreement is for the Seibersdorf lab to be able to extend its current range of trainings to the Austrian armed forces and emergency responders in the field of chemical substances. We would like to thank the Technical Secretariat for their professional support in the preparation as well as during the initial inspection. We remain available for consultations should there be any questions concerning the lab or the facility agreement.

Mr. Chairperson,

In closing, please let me repeat our unwavering support for the work of the OPCW and our full confidence in the Technical Secretariat. I would kindly ask you, Mr. Chairperson, to consider this statement as an official document of the 97th Session of the Executive Council and to post it on the OPCW External Server and public website.

I thank you!