

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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

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

This Executive Council meeting convenes with continued precautions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but with renewed hope as global vaccination distribution provides a powerful tool to combat the spread of this horrific disease. The United States commends the Director-General and Technical Secretariat for ensuring the essential work of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons continues. We look forward to a time when the pandemic has subsided, and we can enjoy a return to more normal operations.

Pandemic notwithstanding, this Organization's main task -- to strengthen and uphold the Chemical Weapons Convention -- remains as important as ever. The overwhelming majority of States Parties believe genuinely in this mission. Unfortunately, a very small number of countries seek to undermine the global norm against chemical weapons use and have attempted to sow discord within our Organization.

The United States believes responsible nations must remain resolute and united in our response to uphold the Convention we all value. We must not shy away from this task. Taking action to address new threats; holding States Parties accountable for non-compliance; using the mechanisms of the Convention; and engaging in debate about critically important topics to our individual and collective security are essential to the healthy functioning of the Convention and this Organization.

The United States is proud of the work of the Conference of the States Parties (CSP), the Executive Council (EC), and the OPCW Technical Secretariat. The Chemical Weapons Convention remains strong thanks to the consistent work of the Organization to address threats and the willingness of States Parties to take action when necessary.

On April 21, 2021, the Twenty-Fifth Session of the CSP overwhelmingly adopted a historic decision condemning Syria for its continued use of chemical weapons. The decision suspended some of Syria's rights and privileges under the Convention, specifically its right to vote and hold office at the OPCW. The decision represents a significant accomplishment for this body and makes clear to Syria that its chemical weapons possession and use will not be tolerated by the global community.

While the adoption of the CSP decision represents a great success, it does not conclude our work regarding Syria's possession and use of chemical weapons. In April of this year, the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) issued its second report, which concluded there are reasonable grounds to believe that a Syrian Arab Air Force helicopter under the control of the

Tiger Forces dropped at least one cylinder of gaseous chlorine in eastern Saraqib, which affected 12 named individuals. The IIT completed this investigation despite the lack of any cooperation from the Syrian government. This report further illustrates that Syria used chemical weapons in violation of its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention and underscores the importance of taking action at the OPCW – as the CSP just did. The IIT continues its work and is expected to issue additional reports later this year in fulfillment of its mandate. We call on States Parties to continue to address the IIT’s findings consistent with our responsibility as States Parties to the Convention and our duty to the victims of these heinous attacks.

The United States urges the Syrian Arab Republic to come into compliance and meet its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Mr. Chairperson,

Another notable case of recent action in support of upholding the Convention is the adoption of the decision, “Understanding Regarding the Aerosolized Use of Central Nervous System-acting Chemicals (CNSAC) for Law Enforcement Purposes,” at the Ninety-Sixth Session of the Executive Council in March. The EC decision paves the way for the November CSP to memorialize the understanding that, under the Chemical Weapons Convention, the aerosolized use of central nervous system-acting chemicals is inconsistent with law enforcement purposes as a “purpose not prohibited.” The United States is not alone in calling for such action. In the short time since the EC decision was adopted in March with 32 co-sponsors, numerous new co-sponsors already have signed on to the CSP decision. Given the global reach of these chemicals, we encourage additional countries to join as co-sponsors of this decision in the lead-up to the Conference. Lobbying efforts by those that seek to stall the decision are propagating misinformation about the CSP decision. The CSP decision would not create any new international obligations for State Parties and is neither a new agreement nor an amendment to the CWC. The United States and our co-sponsors urge all States Parties to vote to adopt the decision at the Twenty-Sixth Session of the Conference to make clear that such chemicals cannot be used safely in aerosolized form consistent with law enforcement purposes, and to dissuade those who may be considering their use.

Mr. Chairperson,

Action must also be taken to address the August 20, 2020, poisoning with a nerve agent from the Novichok group of Mr. Aleksey Navalny by Russia’s Federal Security Services in the Russian Federation. Since Navalny’s poisoning, the Russian government and its propaganda network have been conducting an extensive disinformation campaign to cast doubt on and deflect blame for its role in the attack. Russia’s attack on Mr. Navalny is at least the second time Russia has used nerve agents from the Novichok group in attempted assassinations. Even now, independent investigatory news outlets are reporting several additional cases of attacks on political opponents and linking them to the same group of Russian security service agents that tracked and poisoned Mr. Navalny.

The United States calls on the Russian Federation to explain the situation surrounding its assassination attempt against Mr. Navalny credibly and return to compliance with its obligations under the Convention. There should be no impunity for the use of chemical weapons, or we are all at risk that such chemical weapons use will continue.

Mr. Chairperson,

Lastly, I would like to highlight the tremendous amount of international cooperation that takes place as a result of and for this Organization. Some of the vital contribution this Organization provides to our collective security would not be possible without voluntary contributions by States Parties from around the globe to trust funds – such as those established for work in Syria and the development of the ChemTech Center. States Parties also work bilaterally and multilaterally with regional counterparts to provide targeted assistance on a range of chemical safety and security-related issues. The United States expects to provide assistance to Asia Group, Africa Group, and Latin America and Caribbean Group countries collectively in excess of \$150 million this year to address vulnerabilities to chemical terrorism and other chemical safety and security-related issues, in cooperation with various national and regional counterparts. We call on other States Parties to consider what additional assistance they might provide.

Mr. Chairperson,

As I noted at the outset, collaborating on these important national security issues requires taking action to address new threats; holding States Parties accountable for non-compliance; using the mechanisms of the Convention; and engaging in debate about critically important topics to our individual and collective security. The healthy functioning of the Convention and this Organization is essential to ensuring a world free of chemical weapons.

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.

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