

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-EIGHTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

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

As we gather for the Ninety-Eighth Executive Council session, the United States commends the Director-General and Technical Secretariat for ensuring the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) continues to carry out its critical mandate. The work of this Organization is more vital now than ever in the face of unsettling facts. Since 2013, there have been egregious violations of the Chemical Weapons Convention. We must work together to reverse this trend and reaffirm the world's commitment to end the use of an entire category of weapons of mass destruction.

States Parties overwhelmingly support the OPCW's work, and we must remain resolute and united in our efforts to uphold and strengthen the Convention and the collective security it provides. All countries should work together to halt the disturbing rise of chemical weapons use. One such step is to take action to adopt the proposed decision on the aerosolized use of central nervous system-acting chemicals at the Conference of the States Parties (CSP) later this year. Additionally, together we must empower a strong Technical Secretariat and renew Director-General Arias' term as he continues to ably lead this Organization. Further, and in accordance with the Convention, Russia should provide this body with answers related to the use of a Novichok nerve agent in the assassination attempt against Mr. Aleksey Navalny on its territory, and Syria should provide answers related to continued discrepancies in its declaration.

The United States is proud of the work that the Conference of the States Parties, the Executive Council, and the Technical Secretariat have achieved despite the ongoing pandemic. The Chemical Weapons Convention remains strong thanks to the consistent work of the Organization and its dedicated staff as well as the willingness of States Parties to take action when necessary.

Mr. Chairperson,

The United States has long believed that the threat of the aerosolized use of central nervous system-acting chemicals, both by state and non-state actors, needs to be addressed by the OPCW. We welcome the Executive Council's 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 in March and thank the Council for recommending action by the CSP on this important matter. We encourage all countries to support the adoption of the decision during the Twenty-Sixth Session of the Conference of the States Parties in November; we must memorialize the understanding that the aerosolized use of central nervous system-acting chemicals is inconsistent with law enforcement purposes as a "purpose not prohibited" under the

Chemical Weapons Convention. The draft decision has garnered broad support from every regional group, signaling the need for action. We look forward to its adoption in November.

Mr. Chairperson,

As has been made clear, there is significant work that needs to be accomplished in the coming years. We are confident that the highly professional and hardworking staff members of the Technical Secretariat will continue to faithfully carry out the significant mandates we have entrusted to them, even in the midst of the ongoing pandemic. We also share in the widespread anticipation for the opening of the ChemTech Center in 2023 and look forward to its contribution to the Technical Secretariat and States Parties in the implementation of the Convention.

Mr. Chairperson,

This Organization not only relies on financial resources, but perhaps even more importantly, on its human resources. The United States stands behind the professional and diligent staff of the Technical Secretariat, and its leader, Director-General Arias. Director-General Arias has expertly guided the Organization through the tumultuous period of the COVID-19 pandemic while delivering on the mandate entrusted to him by States Parties in faithfully implementing the Convention. The United States fully supports the renewal of Director-General Arias' appointment for a second term.

Mr. Chairperson,

The United States continues to make steady, measurable progress to complete the destruction of our declared chemical weapons stockpile. Over 96.6 percent, more than 26,909 metric tons, of the initially declared stockpile has been verifiably destroyed. Both of our chemical weapons destruction facilities remain operational in spite of the ongoing pandemic; in fact, both sites were able to continue verifiable operations throughout the pandemic. On September 4, the Blue Grass Chemical Agent-Destruction Pilot Plant Static Detonation Chamber reached an historic milestone when it destroyed the last sulfur mustard (H) 155 millimeter projectile. This is a noteworthy accomplishment as it eliminates another entire class of chemical agent from the U.S. stockpile. The United States continues to review opportunities to optimize performance at the facilities and to act on opportunities to accelerate the completion of chemical weapons destruction. We remain on-track to meet our planned completion date.

Mr. Chairperson,

Over a year ago, Russian security agents poisoned Russian opposition figure Aleksey Navalny with a Novichok nerve agent in Russia. The Russian government and its propaganda network continue to conduct an extensive disinformation campaign to cast doubt on and deflect blame for its role in the attack. In April of this year, 59 States Parties joined in the international call condemning the poisoning of Mr. Navalny with a chemical weapon; urging transparency from the Russian government; and reiterating that those responsible for chemical weapons use must be held to account. Nevertheless, Russia has failed to cooperate in any meaningful way with this Organization and continues to refuse to be transparent about the incident.

We cannot allow impunity for the use of chemical weapons. Doing so will further embolden those who are prepared to continue to use them. All States Parties share an interest in deterring further chemical weapons use and restoring the global norm against such use. We must signal to state and non-state actors alike that the use of chemical weapons will not be tolerated. That is why this year, the United States has imposed two rounds of sanctions and imposed other costs on Russia for its use of a chemical weapon against Mr. Navalny. The Russian Federation should explain the use of a chemical weapon against Mr. Navalny on its soil, declare its remaining chemical weapons program, and verifiably destroy any chemical weapons it continues to possess, including Novichok nerve agents.

Mr. Chairperson,

While the adoption of the Conference of the States Parties decision in April to suspend certain rights and privileges of the Syrian Arab Republic under the Convention represents a significant milestone, it does not conclude our work regarding Syria's possession and use of chemical weapons. This Organization's assessment, and ours, is that the declaration submitted by the Assad regime eight years ago still cannot be considered accurate and complete.

Sadly, the Assad regime continues to deliberately delay and obstruct the work of the OPCW. Syria once again demonstrated its lack of candor when it recently reported the destruction of two containers that had previously been inspected by the Declaration Assessment Team and were relevant to OPCW investigations. Despite instructions to the regime not to open, move, or alter the containers and their contents in any way, without seeking prior written consent of the OPCW, the Assad regime reported these cylinders had been destroyed during an attack on June 8, 2021, at a different location. The regime did not notify the OPCW that the cylinders allegedly had been moved to a new location until it reported their destruction.

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

Mr. Chairperson,

As I noted at the outset, we must work together to reverse the trend of chemical weapons use. We not only do this by providing the support the Organization and its leadership need to execute its mandate, but also by holding States Parties accountable for their actions in order to deter further use. We need to maintain a strong, capable, and well-represented OPCW. At the same time, violations of the Convention must not go unanswered, lest we risk irreparably damaging the Convention we have all fought so hard to preserve.

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.