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SLOVENIA

**STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE EUROPEAN UNION
DELIVERED BY H.E. AMBASSADOR SANJA ŠTIGLIC
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA TO THE
OPCW AT THE NINETY-SEVENTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairperson,
Director-General,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I have the honour of speaking on behalf of the European Union.

The candidate countries Albania, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia and Turkey, and the EFTA (European Free Trade Association) countries Iceland and Norway, members of the EEA (European Economic Area), as well as Georgia and Ukraine align themselves with this statement.

Andorra, Monaco and San Marino also associate themselves with this statement.

The European Union (EU) warmly welcomes the new Chairperson, H.E. Ambassador Abdelouahab Bellouki of Morocco, at the helm of the Executive Council. He has all the qualities required for a successful tenure as Chairperson - the knowledge, the experience, and the trust of the States Parties. We thank him for his willingness to assume this responsibility and assure him of our full support in steering the work of the Executive Council in the months to come.

We also take this opportunity to commend the leadership of OPCW Director-General Fernando Arias, and the Technical Secretariat for their efforts to implement the Chemical Weapons Convention (“the Convention”) under exceptional circumstances caused by the pandemic. In this context, we underline the complementarity of the efforts and cooperation between the OPCW and the United Nations. We appreciate the regular sharing of information of the OPCW activities and investigations with the United Nations Secretary-General and the Director-General’s briefings to the United Nations Security Council.

The European Union reiterates its full confidence in the OPCW Technical Secretariat, its professionalism, impartiality, and well-established technical expertise in implementing the Convention and tasks assigned by the States Parties. We remain steadfast in defending the Organisation against attacks on its integrity and credibility through deliberate campaigns of disinformation. In addition, taking into account repeated malicious activities aimed at



disrupting the work of the Technical Secretariat, it is my pleasure to inform the Executive Council that the European Union has decided to contribute EUR 2.1 million to the OPCW Cyber Security, Resilience and Information Assurance Programme. This concrete assistance is dedicated to the urgent upgrade of OPCW information systems and capabilities, which is necessary to ensure business continuity at the OPCW HQ as well as of its missions in the field.

The European Union welcomes the decision adopted by the Twenty-Fifth Session of the Conference of the States Parties suspending the voting rights and privileges of the Syrian Arab Republic due to its failure to comply with the Convention. The decision is a strong message by the international community against impunity for the use of chemical weapons, in defence of international law and international humanitarian law.

The EU and its Member States consider that the decision is an appropriate response by the Conference of the States Parties to the clear violation of the core principles of the Convention by the Syrian Arab Republic. This decision comes more than seven years after the adoption of the United Nations Security Council resolution 2118 (2013) and is a consequence of the continued failure of the Syrian Arab Republic to fully declare and destroy its chemical weapons programme.

The Syrian Regime's failure to respect its international obligations under the Convention is substantiated through comprehensive and thorough investigations carried out by the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigation Mechanism (JIM) as well as the OPCW Declaration Assessment Team (DAT), Fact-Finding Missions (FFM) and the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT). The European Union strongly condemns the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian Arab Air Force in Ltamenah in March 2017 and in Saraqib in February 2018, as concluded by the OPCW IIT reports.

We urge the Syrian Arab Republic to reveal the full extent of its chemical weapons programme and return to full compliance of the Convention. The addition of a new pending issue regarding the initial declaration of the Syrian Arab Republic is a matter of grave concern. We urge the Syrian Arab Republic to provide the relevant information to the Technical Secretariat in order to resolve the pending issues. The European Union and its Member States will continue to work at national and international levels in order to address chemical weapons attacks and other atrocities committed in the Syrian Arab Republic.

The European Union looks forward to the continuation of the work of the IIT and the release of its next report and is determined to ensure full follow up of all findings. We have already imposed restrictive measures on five senior Syrian officials and scientists and one entity for their role in the development and use of chemical weapons. We are ready to consider introducing further measures as appropriate and will continue to work towards ensuring full accountability for those responsible for these egregious crimes.

The European Union also continues to support collective efforts to ensure accountability for perpetrators of chemical attacks through the International Partnership Against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons. The European Union welcomes the partnership's statement related to the release of the second IIT report published in May 2021 on their website (<https://www.noimpunitychemicalweapons.org>).

Addressing the threat from chemical weapons use is a key item on the Executive Council's agenda and is essential for upholding international norms related to chemical weapons use. The European Union once again reiterates its strong concerns that the Russian Federation has not reacted to international calls to thoroughly and transparently investigate the assassination attempt on Alexei Navalny who was poisoned in Russia by a chemical nerve agent of the novichok group in August 2020. The poisoning has been confirmed, beyond doubt, by specialised laboratories in Germany, France and Sweden, as well as by the OPCW.

Impunity for the use of chemical weapons must not and will not be tolerated. Those responsible for the assassination attempt on Mr Navalny must be brought to justice. On 14 October 2020, the European Union imposed restrictive measures under its chemical weapons sanctions regime against six Russian individuals and one entity responsible for inducing and providing support to the poisoning of Alexei Navalny with the novichok nerve agent.

Furthermore, the European Union is concerned to learn that the Russian Federation appears to no longer consider a technical assistance visit relevant, despite the readiness of the OPCW Technical Secretariat to deploy its experts in order to help clarify the case. The European Union once again urges the Russian Federation, in full transparency and without further delay, to disclose and credibly explain the circumstances of the assassination attempt, in accordance with the obligations defined in Article VII of the Convention, which urges all States Parties not to permit in any place under its control any activity prohibited by the Convention.

Implementation of the Convention requires a predictable and solid financial base. We call on all States Parties to pay their assessed contributions in full and on time. The combined European Union Member States assessed contributions make up almost 25% of the regular budget. The European Union's on-going voluntary contributions in support of the OPCW key activities and operations through three dedicated EU Council decisions amount to EUR 13.7 million. In addition, EU Member States have made voluntary contributions in their national capacity.

Establishment of the OPCW Centre for Chemistry and Technology (ChemTech Centre) will be key to enhancing the Organisation's capacity to perform its core tasks in verification, inspection and capacity building. A significant number of States Parties have committed voluntary funding to its establishment. For its part, the European Union and its Member States have made substantial voluntary contributions, in total amounting to EUR 16.1 million. We welcome the good progress made in the implementation of the project which will benefit all States Parties.

The European Union welcomes the decision to establish a cross regional working group to develop a proposal for the manner in which the Conference of the States Parties shall appoint the External Auditor of the OPCW in the future. It is important that the modalities on the appointment of the External Auditor take account of best practice from other international organisations and enable the Conference to take future decisions based on a full consideration of the technical merits and cost effectiveness of the nominations received.

The Covid-19 pandemic has obliged us to work and interact using new modalities for the past 15 months, and the European Union applauds the considerable efforts undertaken by the Technical Secretariat to ensure business continuity of the OPCW in these difficult times. During the COVID-19-induced crisis, it became very clear that in some specific circumstances, in-person meetings might not be possible and using virtual meeting technology might then become the only way for OPCW policy-making organs to fulfil their duties. The European

Union therefore welcomes and fully supports the timely German initiative on Executive Council business continuity and congratulates States Parties on their constructive engagement in the past year. The most recent German working paper (EC-97/WP.1, dated 21 June 2021) proposes a balanced wording for a future Executive Council decision on business continuity. It takes into account all concerns expressed by States Parties during the consultation process. The European Union and its Member States encourage all OPCW States Parties to further consider the proposed text and support its possible adoption at a forthcoming Session of the Executive Council.

I would kindly ask you to consider this statement as an official document and post it on the OPCW external server and public website.

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