

**AUSTRIA**

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR ASTRID HARZ**

**PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF AUSTRIA TO THE OPCW  
AT THE TWENTY-SIXTH SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES**

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 Head of the Security Policy Unit, Ms Marjolijn Van Deelen. I would nevertheless like to make a few additional remarks in our national capacity. Austria thanks Ambassador José Antonio Zabalgaitia Trejo for his able leadership of the Twenty-Fifth Conference of the States Parties. Austria congratulates Ambassador Bård Ivar Svendsen for his nomination as Chairperson of the Twenty-Sixth Conference of the States Parties; we look forward to working with you.

The work of the OPCW continues to be heavily affected by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the Conference has to meet once more under stringent restrictions. We thank the Director-General and the staff of the Technical Secretariat for their hard work and their dedication to the OPCW in these challenging times. In the past two years, we had to adapt the way we work, both here in The Hague and in capitals. It is important that we do use these lessons learnt to also improve the way we work in the future. This situation continues to highlight the importance of ensuring business continuity within the OPCW, both for the Technical Secretariat as well as the policy making organs. We therefore fully support the ongoing consultation process launched by the Permanent Representation of Germany and we hope that we will be able to reach an agreement in the coming months.

One of the areas that was and is most affected by the pandemic are the industry inspections. Austria has undertaken significant efforts to ensure that even during certain restrictions inspections in Austria can still take place and we managed to conduct a range of different inspections, including an initial inspection for the Facility Agreement that was adopted during the 97<sup>th</sup> session of the Executive Council. The main lesson we learnt is that with a little bit of flexibility inspections can take place in a safe and timely manner. We therefore call on all States Parties to do their utmost to allow the resumption of inspections as soon as possible, including the possibility of combining back-to-back inspections in order to start reducing the backlog.

As every year, one of the most important decisions in front of the Conference will be the adoption of the Budget. During several rounds of negotiations that were conducted in very a constructive spirit, many important issues have been addressed and the Executive Council forwarded the Draft Programme and Budget of the OPCW for the biennium 2022/2023 (C-26/DEC/CRP.5) to the Conference. While it was regrettable that a vote was once more necessary, the adoption with an overwhelming majority clearly shows the strong support for the draft. Austria continues to support the Draft Programme and Budget, and we call on all States Parties to do the same in order to allow the Technical Secretariat to continue to implement the important tasks that we have entrusted them with.

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. Any use of chemical weapons is absolutely unacceptable. We continue to call on the Russian Federation to address the important questions raised by 45 States Parties under Article IX(2) of the Convention and we reiterate our conviction that there cannot be impunity for the use of chemical weapons.

Austria continues to be very worried about the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic. The adoption of Decision C-25/DEC.9 during the 25<sup>th</sup> Conference was an important step in ensuring that there will not be impunity for the use of chemical weapons. Unfortunately, the Syrian Arab Republic so far has not shown any signs of good will and has further reduced their cooperation with the Technical Secretariat. The failure to issue visas to OPCW Personnel is outrageous. The only way forward is for the Syrian Arab republic start fully cooperating in good faith with the OPCW. Austria continues to fully support the work of the Technical Secretariat, including the Declaration Assessment Team, the Fact-Finding Mission, and the Investigation and Identification Team.

After more than 10 years of inclusive discussions, the Executive Council during its 96<sup>th</sup> session adopted Decision EC-96/DEC.7 entitled “Understanding Regarding the Aerosolised use of Central Nervous System-Acting Chemicals for Law Enforcement Purposes”. Austria would like to thank Australia, Switzerland and the United States for their hard work on this issue, which allowed many important concerns to be addressed during several rounds of consultations and negotiations. As a co-sponsor, Austria fully supports draft decision C-26/DEC/CRP.1 and calls on all States Parties to do the same.

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 Twenty-Fifth Conference of the States Parties and to post it on the OPCW external server and public website.

I thank you.