

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

**STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR BONNIE JENKINS
UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE FOR
ARMS CONTROL AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY
AT THE TWENTY-SIXTH SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES
PARTIES**

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

It is an honor to join you virtually for the Twenty-Sixth Session of the Conference of the States Parties of the Chemical Weapons Convention. As we continue to gather against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, we should be proud of what we have accomplished as an international community since the pandemic began. Physical limitations and precautions that would have been unthinkable two years ago have not prevented us from working together to uphold and reinforce the international norm against the use of chemical weapons.

The United States commends the Director General and Technical Secretariat. This Organization is unique within the international community, and the Chemical Weapons Convention remains strong thanks to the consistent work of the Organization's staff, as well as the willingness of States Parties to take action when necessary.

The international norm against the use of chemical weapons remains under threat by only a handful of countries. In the face of these violations of the Convention, we must remain united in our efforts to pursue accountability for those responsible and to uphold and strengthen the Convention and the collective security it provides. Our work here is not done. We call again on Russia and the Assad regime to comply with their obligations. As we look to the future, we must address new and emerging threats as well. One action this body can take is to adopt the draft decision affirming that the aerosolized use of central nervous system-acting chemicals (CNS-acting chemicals) is inconsistent with law enforcement purposes as a purpose not prohibited under the Convention. And, we must continue to empower the OPCW to fulfill its mandate with approval for the necessary decisions, resources, and staffing to keep the Organization strong. As such, we look forward to the reappointment of Director General Arias for a second term and to the approval of the Organization's first-ever biennial budget.

On October 5, 2021, 45 countries – from all regional groups – jointly submitted questions to the Russian Federation under Article IX of the Convention. Specifically, those States asked Russia to describe what actions it had taken to address the poisoning of opposition leader Aleksey Navalny with a Novichok nerve agent on Russian territory, what further steps Russia intended to take, and why Russia had not been able to cooperate with the OPCW under standard terms for a Technical Assistance Visit. To date, Russia has not provided a sufficient response to these questions. Instead, 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. We must not allow these questions to remain unanswered.

We must not forget that this is not the only time that Russia has used a Novichok nerve agent in recent years. In March 2018, only months after claiming to have completed destruction of its chemical weapons stockpile, Russia used a Novichok nerve agent in an assassination attempt against Sergei Skripal in the United Kingdom. These attacks clearly show that Russia retains an undeclared chemical weapons program in violation of its obligations under the Convention. We must not allow impunity for the use of chemical weapons.

We similarly must hold the Assad regime accountable for its violations of the Convention. The world has seen overwhelming evidence of numerous incidences of non-compliance by the Assad regime. The Technical Secretariat's assessment, and ours, is that the declaration submitted by the Assad regime eight years ago remains inaccurate and incomplete. While April's decision 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. Without accountability for the atrocities committed against the Syrian people, lasting peace in Syria will remain out of reach. We urge the Assad regime to complete the measures set out in the Executive Council's July 2020 decision and to comply with its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention.

It is unfortunate that the Assad regime continues to deliberately delay and obstruct the work of the OPCW. The regime 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 at a different location on June 8, 2021. The regime did not notify the OPCW that the cylinders had been moved, as the regime alleges, to a new location until it reported their destruction. The Technical Secretariat has repeatedly asked for further information regarding the reported destroyed cylinders, but has received no response from Damascus.

As the global community continues to address the possession and use of chemical weapons, new threats are emerging. The United States believes that the threat of the aerosolized use of CNS-acting chemicals, by both state and non-state actors, needs to be addressed by OPCW Member States. The decision that is under consideration at this CSP does not create any new international obligations for State Parties – it is neither a new agreement nor an amendment to the Convention. Rather, the decision simply affirms States Parties' understanding on an application of the Convention: namely, that the aerosolized use of CNS-acting chemicals is inconsistent with law enforcement purposes. If adopted, the CSP decision would contribute to preventing the use of aerosolized CNS-acting chemicals for offensive purposes by state and non-state actors. We thank Switzerland, Australia, and our other co-sponsors for their partnership in adding this important issue to the CSP agenda and bringing this issue to the attention of States Parties. Adopting the CSP decision should not be controversial, and we look forward to its adoption.

It is evident that States Parties continue to have work to do to counter the chemical weapons threat. The United States is confident in the ability of the Organization's leadership and professional staff members to carry out the significant mandates we have entrusted to them to aid

in our mission. We therefore fully support the reappointment of Director General Arias for a second term of office. While we rely on the Organization to execute its work, all of us together must provide the resources the Organization needs to perform the functions we, as States Parties, have asked of it. Now is not the time to waver in our support. In this regard, we also urge States Parties to support the OPCW's first ever biennial budget proposal and vote yes for the modest increase requested for the Organization.

As we look to the future of this Organization, there is much to be excited about. The United States remains on track to complete the destruction of our chemical weapons stockpile in 2023, marking a significant milestone. Around the same time, the new Center for Chemistry and Technology is expected to come online, which will help the OPCW strengthen its role as the world's leading expert on chemical weapons issues and guide the organization as it adapts to future needs. The Center will also be a valuable resource in strengthening international cooperation and capacity-building in the years to come. The United States expects to provide assistance to Africa, Asia, and Latin America and Caribbean regional group countries in excess of \$150 million in 2021 to address vulnerabilities to chemical terrorism and other chemical safety issues, in cooperation with various national and regional counterparts. In addition, the United States is pleased to announce additional financial support for the OPCW Africa Program in the amount of 165,000 euros, which will fully fund the proposed special project on a regional conference on the transfer of toxic chemicals. We call on other States Parties to consider what additional assistance they might provide to best position this organization for the future. Finally, as the OPCW prepares for the future, the role of women should be strengthened across all areas of operations, decision-making, and capacity-building in order to ensure equitable and effective outcomes on these vital issues of international security.

Allow me to conclude by again commending this Organization and all those who continue to work together to uphold the international norm against the use of chemical weapons. This work is vitally important to our individual and collective security. The healthy functioning of the Chemical Weapons Convention and the OPCW is essential to ensuring a world free of chemical weapons.

I ask that this statement be designated an official document of this Conference session and posted on both the external server and the public website.

Thank you.