

Statement by H.E. Kateřina Sequensová, Permanent Representative of the Czech Republic to the OPCW, at the 26th Session of the Conference of States Parties

Mr. Chair,

Mr. Director-General,

Distinguished delegates,

The Czech Republic fully aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier on behalf of the European Union and would like to use this opportunity to make a few remarks in its national capacity.

At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Ambassador Svendsen, for your election as the Chair of this session of the Conference of States Parties. You have the full support of my delegation and we are confident that your able guidance this week will lead us towards a successful outcome. I would also like to express our appreciation for the work of Ambassador José Antonio Zabalgoitia Trejo, Chairperson of the 25th Session of the Conference of States Parties.

Allow me to take this opportunity to thank the OPCW Director General, Ambassador Fernando Arias for his leadership and managerial skills, which enabled to continue with performance of the tasks of the organization and implementation of the Convention notwithstanding numerous challenges posed by COVID-19. We appreciate your commitment to work and have full confidence that you will follow with your efforts towards ensuring the implementation of the Convention. We consider you the most suitable candidate for the position and we support your re-appointment.

One of the key tasks before us this week is to approve the biennium programme and budget of the OPCW for 2022 and 2023. The Czech Republic supports the revised draft programme and budget recommended for approval by the Executive Council last month. We consider the proposed spending level justified as it will allow the OPCW to continue with its essential activities, including inspections, assistance programmes and international cooperation. We hope that the adoption of the proposed budget will be supported by all States Parties. Further, we would also like to reiterate the important obligation of all States Parties to pay their assessed contributions on time and in full.

Understanding regarding the aerosolized use of central nervous system (CNS) acting chemicals for law enforcement purposes is another crucial decision for this Conference. We are deeply concerned by the findings mentioned in the report of the Scientific Advisory Board that note the permanent harm and death caused by CNS acting chemicals in law enforcement operations. Any such use cannot be understood differently but as inconsistent with law enforcement purposes as a purpose not prohibited under the Convention. We therefore support the proposal and hope that the draft decision, recommended for approval by the Executive Council in March this year, will be adopted by States Parties at this Conference.

Syria's continued violations of the key principles of the Chemical Weapons Convention was addressed earlier this year by adopting the decision by the Conference of the States Parties and suspending certain rights and privileges of the Syrian Arab Republic. Not only has Syria breached its obligations stemming from the Convention, including resolving outstanding issues by submitting full declaration and destructing its chemical weapons completely, but it has also used chemical weapons which was confirmed by the independent investigation carried out by among others the UN – OPCW JIM and OPCW IIT. Such a clear violation of international law and in particular international humanitarian law called for a resolute decision. Only full compliance with the Convention by Syria can reverse the

decision and allow it to regain suspended rights and privileges. We also remain firm on that any use of chemical weapons cannot go unpunished and that perpetrators of these crimes are brought to justice.

We are concerned with the continued lack of cooperation of the Syrian Arab Republic with the Technical Secretariat of the OPCW which has serious consequences for the fulfillment of its mandate. Obstructions consisting in denial of access of the OPCW staff to Syria, including late issuance of visas, are in contravention of the Convention. We therefore reiterate our call on the Syrian Arab Republic to fully cooperate with the Technical Secretariat, including issuance of visas to all OPCW staff on time.

On a more positive note, the Czech Republic is a strong supporter of the work of the OPCW in Syria and it is my pleasure to announce that the Czech Republic has contributed approximately 40 thousand Euros for the OPCW activities in Syria.

Mr. Chair,

The assassination attempt on Alexei Navalny who was poisoned on the territory of the Russian Federation by a chemical nerve agent of the "Novichok" group remains an utmost concern for the Czech Republic. The attack requires our full attention. The circumstances of the attack must be credibly disclosed and it is the responsibility of the Russian Federation to do so, as it took place on its territory. Therefore, the Czech Republic supports the use of formal procedure envisaged in Article IX paragraph 2 of the Convention by submission of questions regarding matters that need clarification to the Russian Federation. We call on the Russian Federation to comply with its obligations under Convention and provide necessary information that sufficiently answer the concerns raised in the questions submitted by 45 States Parties.

The Czech Republic find the building of capacity of States Parties to prevent and respond to chemical threats and incidents an important activity carried out within the purview of the Convention. We support on a long-term basis the OPCW assistance and protection activities under Article X of the Convention. Our financial support consist in providing regular voluntary contributions, whereas our expertise allows us to host training courses on our territory and conduct trainings in other parts of the world. Although lately the courses had to be moved to an on-line environment or cancelled due to COVID-19 we hope to return to the in-person trainings once it will be safe in terms of health for all. Nevertheless, we are committed to continue with these activities in the future.

Mr. Chair,

Allow me now to turn to another building, the one of the new Center for Chemistry and Technology. This state-of art project is crucial for strengthening the OPCW's capabilities in performing its core functions, inter alia addressing new and emerging chemical weapons threats and enhancing investigative capabilities. The Czech Republic has previously supported the project by providing voluntary financial contribution. We commend the efforts of the Technical Secretariat to keep the project on track despite challenging circumstances.

We would like to ask that this statement be designed an official document of this session and posted on both the external server and public website.