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VENEZUELA

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR GLADYS MARÍA GUTIÉRREZ ALVARADO
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE BOLIVARIAN
REPUBLIC OF VENEZUELA TO THE OPCW
AT THE NINETY-SEVENTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL
IN RESPONSE TO THE STATEMENT BY THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

Mr Chairperson,
Mr Director-General,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,

The Venezuelan delegation congratulates the new Chairperson of the Executive Council, representing the African Group, H.E. Ambassador Abdelouahab Bellouki, and wishes him every success in managing our work, while reiterating our commitment to working in a dedicated manner in support of the Organisation's common objectives.

We also welcome and recognise the work of H.E. Fernando Arias and we thank him for his reports. We also express our recognition of the work of all of the members of the Technical Secretariat, particularly in this difficult and complex time.

The Venezuelan delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered by H.E. Fikrat Akhundov, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Azerbaijan, on behalf of the Member States of the Non-Aligned Movement that are States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention and China.

We would like to once again address the irregularity of the way in which we are convening this Council session and note that just like Council sessions in the past, it is taking place in special circumstances stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic. In this regard, we hope that the Ninety-Eighth Session of the Executive Council will be able to convene as normal, in accordance with the standard norms and procedures of the OPCW. In this sense, we trust that the Organisation will continue with the implementation of more inclusive mechanisms, such as the use of technological platforms that make it possible to participate on equal grounds, including for observer States, all while observing the health and social distancing regulations imposed due to the pandemic.

We emphasise that the destruction of chemical weapons is the most fundamental issue, and the priority of the Organisation, which is why we urge the United States of America—the only possessor State Party—to accelerate all measures necessary to finalise, in an expedited manner, the process of destroying its stockpile in accordance with the provisions of the Convention, as well as the decisions of the Organisation's regulatory bodies.



With regard to the elimination of Syrian chemical weapons and the destruction of Syrian chemical weapons production facilities, we welcome the reports from the Director-General, and we recognise the cooperation maintained by the Syrian Arab Republic with the Technical Secretariat. At the same time, we urge the latter to continue successfully without any external interference and with strict respect for Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Within the context of this session of the Executive Council, it is important to remember that the implementation of some of the pillars of the Convention remain outstanding within this Organisation. Venezuela reiterates the need to make progress and achieve specific objectives in implementing the provisions of Article XI, pertaining to the economic and technological development of the States Parties, as this is one of the pillars of the Convention, the realisation of which continues to be delayed in spite of its importance for all States Parties.

Venezuela underscores the need to promote international cooperation for the benefit of all the States Parties via the exchange of technology, material, and equipment for peaceful purposes within the field of chemistry, and the elimination of any form of discriminatory restriction. In this regard, we call for the rejection of coercive, unilateral measures against other States Parties, as these are contrary to the letter and spirit of the Convention and affect their long-term viability, as they have an adverse impact on the development of those countries that, like ours, find themselves seriously affected by these arbitrary and unilateral sanctions.

The recent report published this past 12 February 2021 regarding the preliminary conclusions from the visit to the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela by the United Nations Special Rapporteur regarding the negative impact of the unilateral coercive measures on the ability to enjoy human rights in our country clearly reflects the scope of these so-called sanctions, the impact of which transcends the borders of the nations against which they are imposed, and constitute a violation of international law and violate the principle of sovereign equality of the States, in addition to constituting interference in the domestic affairs of Venezuela, which also affects its regional relations, as well as relations with various international organisations, including its interaction with the OPCW.

As we have stated previously within this forum, for a number of years now, Venezuela has been facing a series of aggressions that vary in nature, such as, among others, a siege upon its economy, an attack on its currency, and a blockade against its financial institutions as a consequence of the imposition of coercive, unilateral measures-cum-sanctions against the country, making commercial exchange and economic development impossible, impeding the acquisition of foods, medicines, medical equipment, and general goods and services, which are fundamental for the people and the maintenance of the national industry—the petrol industry in particular—a fundamental pillar of its economy, together with a policy of confiscating the country's assets and freezing its accounts.

Our country reiterates its willingness to honour its financial commitments to the OPCW. In this regard, we recognise the goodwill of the Director-General to support the actions necessary for the establishment, by the Organisation and the Host Country, of a mechanism or channel that will make it possible for our country to have a secure way in which to meet said financial commitments. Regrettably, until now, these efforts have been unproductive due to the coercive, unilateral measures that make the normal interactions to meet these commitments impossible. For all of these reasons, we reiterate our request for assistance, both to the relevant departments of the Technical Secretariat, as well as to the national entities of the Host Country to allow progress and facilitate the transfer of financial resources from our country to the Organisation.

The most vehement condemnation of the use of chemical weapons and toxic chemicals as a weapon anywhere, by anyone, and under any circumstance is a principled position of Venezuela.

Our country expresses its profound concern over the repeated existing practice of attempting to accuse States Parties of using chemical weapons based on unsubstantiated accusations made via reports divulged by certain media outlets, social networks, or any other open source of information, including some non-governmental entities. This trend could create a dangerous precedent for the future work of the OPCW.

Within this context, our efforts should be aimed at improving the effectiveness of the OPCW's activities in terms of addressing the cases of alleged use of chemical weapons, with the imperative that all approaches are taken strictly within the framework of this Convention. This concerns the maintenance and strengthening of the most important multilateral instrument in the field of non-proliferation and disarmament.

With regard to the use of aerosolised central nervous system-acting (CNS-acting) chemicals for law enforcement purposes, we find it critical to continue discussions and debate this from a constructive stance particularly within the regulatory bodies of the Organisation. It is fundamental that all States Parties have sufficient information to help understand the scope of all of its technical and legal aspects before taking any specific action. For this reason, we advocate for searching for a consensus and dialogue among all the States Parties, which would make it possible to create the conditions necessary to take consensus-based decisions as the working formula, instead of giving in to the temptation of forcing a vote, which would only lead to greater polarisation within our Organisation.

With regard to the proposal to modify the Regulations of the Advisory Board for Administrative and Financial Matters (ABAF), my country advocates for respect for the legitimate and sovereign right that all States Parties have to nominate the candidates that they believe to possess the professional requisites to take on the mandate of this Body. At the same time, we support a consensus-based decision on this issue.

We once again reaffirm the need to defend the principles set out in the Convention, safeguarding the technical essence of this Organisation, and preserving this multilateral space, which is so important for the disarmament and non-proliferation of chemical weapons in the world.

Finally, I kindly request, Mr Chairperson, that this statement be considered an official document of the Ninety-Seventh Session of the Executive Council and made available on the Organisation's website.

Thank you for your kind attention.

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