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UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND

**STATEMENT BY THE DELEGATION OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT
BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND TO THE OPCW AT THE TWENTY-FIFTH
SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES
UNDER AGENDA ITEM 9(D)**

Mr Chairperson,

It is just over three years since the first confirmed use of a novichok nerve agent as a chemical weapon. That attack took place in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, with deadly consequences. Last August, to our horror, the world witnessed a similar attempted assassination, this time of a prominent Russian opposition figure, Alexei Navalny. That Mr Navalny survived the attack is undoubtedly due to the swift reactions of the aircrew, and medical team in Omsk hospital who administered atropine—well known as a nerve agent antidote—and provided essential life support.

Any poisoning with a nerve agent constitutes the use of a chemical weapon and is banned under the terms of the Chemical Weapons Convention (“the Convention”). The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons therefore has a very clear interest in this case. Independent analysis by two designated laboratories confirmed that it was indeed a novichok nerve agent which was used in the attack on Mr Navalny. The evidence is undeniable. The attack took place on Russian Federation territory and according to press reports, one of those responsible has confirmed the details of the attack directly to Mr Navalny.

That the Russian Federation maintains a secret chemical weapons programme can no longer be credibly denied. In the 1980s the Soviet Union developed a new class of ‘fourth generation’ nerve agents, known as novichoks. A branch of the State Institute for Organic Chemistry and Technology at Shikhany near Volgograd led the development of these weapons. The codeword for the offensive chemical weapons programme (of which novichok were one part) was ‘Foliant’. It is highly likely that novichoks were developed in order to circumvent international chemical weapons controls. Long after signing and ratifying the Convention, the Russian Federation produced and stockpiled small quantities of novichoks. Russia has a track record of State sponsored assassinations both inside and outside the former Soviet Union.

We are now seeing a sadly familiar pattern of behaviour following the identification of this chemical weapon attack. Rather than answering legitimate questions about what took place, the Russian Federation is attacking the OPCW Technical Secretariat for doing its job and once again is concocting increasingly bizarre conspiracy theories. Just as it did following the novichok attack in Salisbury, when the Russian Federation promoted over 40 contradictory narratives, none of which were supported by evidence.



Mr Chairperson, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland welcomes the Director-General's efforts to provide technical assistance, as requested, to Germany and the Russian Federation in accordance with Article VIII of the Convention. In 2018 the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland benefitted from such assistance and—like Germany—was able to swiftly comply with the standard requirements for such visits to take place. We can see from the published correspondence between the Director-General and the Russian Federation that Russia has sought to impose impossible conditions on their request for technical assistance, such as having any laboratory analysis conducted in a Russian laboratory rather than by independent OPCW designated laboratories. Standard practice and legal requirements apply equally to all States Parties to the OPCW.

Having thrown up barriers to OPCW engagement for months, the Russian Federation has now effectively cancelled its request for technical assistance. The Russian Federation has still to provide a clear explanation for how a prominent opposition figure came to be attacked with a deadly nerve agent on Russian soil. There can be no impunity for those who use chemical weapons in violation of international treaty obligations.

Thank you.

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