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NEW ZEALAND

STATEMENT BY MS KERRY GILLAM-O'CONNOR DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE OPCW AT THE NINETY-SIXTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Mr Chairperson,

We express our sincere appreciation to you, Ambassador Agustín Vásquez Gómez, for your leadership during an immensely disruptive and difficult year for us all as we seek to continue our important work under the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic. We also thank the Technical Secretariat for again finding the means to organise the Executive Council session given the difficult circumstances and operating context. Moving forward, we urge that all technical solutions be explored to allow for two-way virtual participation for all States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention (hereinafter “the Convention”).

As we gather in our joint commitment to completely eliminate, and prevent the re-emergence of chemical weapons, New Zealand is disappointed and concerned that over the last decade there continues to be issues regarding compliance with the Convention, including cases of confirmed use of chemical weapons.

We are resolute in our conviction that any use of chemical weapons anywhere, by anyone, under any circumstances is unacceptable. Any use is an affront to the global rules and norms that we have collectively committed to uphold. As States Parties to the Convention, it is our duty to continue to condemn the use of chemical weapons and to make every effort to bring States Parties found to be responsible back into compliance under the Convention. To do otherwise would allow impunity and injustice.

New Zealand remains gravely concerned by the repeated, confirmed use of chemical weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic. The Syrian Arab Republic's actions represent a serious violation of the Convention. We expected the Syrian Arab Republic to comply with the decision of the Executive Council adopted on 9 July 2020, on ‘Addressing the Possession and Use of Chemical Weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic’, which New Zealand co-sponsored, and to cooperate with the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team (IIT). However, the Syrian Arab Republic has done neither. This is deeply disappointing. The Syrian Arab Republic continues to miss opportunities to fully declare all of its remaining chemical weapon stockpiles. Gaps, discrepancies, and inconsistencies relating to the Syrian Arab Republic's initial declaration remain, as the Declarations Assessment Team (DAT) continues to conclude.

The Syrian Arab Republic must not be allowed to escape accountability for its use of chemical weapons. In light of the Syrian Arab Republic's failure to comply with the Executive Council's



9 July 2020 decision and its obligations under the Convention, we call on States Parties to take action at the upcoming resumption of the Twenty-Fifth Session of the Conference of the States Parties and suspend the Syrian Arab Republic's rights and privileges as a State Party until it fully declares and destroys its entire chemical weapons programme and completes its initial declaration in full.

New Zealand was equally concerned by the announcement from Germany, on 2 September 2020, that Mr Alexei Navalny was poisoned with a nerve agent from the novichok group of chemicals. OPCW analysis has confirmed that the biomarkers of the cholinesterase inhibitor found in Mr Navalny's biomedical samples have similar structural characteristics as the toxic chemicals belonging to schedules 1.A.14 and 1.A.15 in the Annex on Chemicals to the Convention. This raises serious questions that demand answers. The cancellation by the Russian Federation of its request for an OPCW technical assistance visit is a step in the wrong direction. We repeat our call to the Russian Federation to investigate and to fully cooperate with the international community and the OPCW.

To strengthen our Convention, New Zealand wants to make progress in addressing the use of central nervous system (CNS)-acting chemicals in aerosolised form for law enforcement purposes. We remain concerned about the serious health and safety risks posed by these chemicals and the possibility of their deliberate misuse. New Zealand endorses the draft decision on an "Understanding Regarding the Aerosolized Use of Central Nervous System-Acting Chemicals for Law Enforcement Purposes" which is currently before the Executive Council and calls on members of the Executive Council to support its adoption.

Finally, New Zealand wishes to acknowledge the exceptional work of the Organisation, the Technical Secretariat, and the Director-General in particular. In adapting and delivering to the highest standards despite the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, we are grateful for your continued diligence, professionalism, and transparency, and for your work to uphold the Convention.

Thank you.

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