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SWEDEN

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR ANNIKA MARKOVIC
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE KINGDOM OF SWEDEN TO THE
OPCW AT THE NINETY-SIXTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairperson,

Allow me to extend Sweden's warm thanks to Director-General Fernando Arias for his statement covering the Executive Council's comprehensive agenda. We share the praise expressed by many speakers to the Director-General and his staff for their efforts and determination in ensuring the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention ("the Convention") under these difficult circumstances.

We would also like to thank H.E. Ambassador Agustín Vásquez Gómez of El Salvador for his work and commitment during his tenure as the Chairperson of the Executive Council.

Sweden is, as always, fully committed to supporting the Council in its preparations for the upcoming Conference of the State Parties. We trust that the second part of the conference will take place as currently planned.

Sweden stands firmly behind the statement of the European Union, delivered by Ambassador Rosa Batoreu of Portugal. I would like to add a few remarks in our national capacity.

As per most of the States Parties to the Convention, Sweden is, and will continue to be, a strong defender of the integrity and impartiality of the OPCW's work. We reject the unfounded accusations directed towards the OPCW and its Technical Secretariat.

Allow me once again to reiterate Sweden's full support for the work of the OPCW in the Syrian Arab Republic. We condemn in the strongest terms the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian Arab Air Force, as concluded by the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT). The comprehensive follow-up of its findings must be ensured. This applies also to the next, forthcoming, report of the IIT, whatever its content.

We note with regret, once again, that the Syrian Arab Republic has not provided the information requested by the Executive Council in its decision of 9 July 2020. The Syrian Arab Republic has clearly not returned to full compliance with the Convention.

Along with a large group of States Parties, Sweden is a co-sponsor of the draft decision entitled "Addressing the Possession and Use of Chemical Weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic" (C-25/DEC/CRP.10). We believe that the decision would be the clear and appropriate response



by the Conference of the States Parties to the violations of the Convention. We call upon all States Parties to support the adoption of the draft decision at the resumed session of the Twenty-Fifth Session of the Conference of the States Parties.

Sweden condemns in the strongest terms the assassination attempt on Alexei Navalny that took place in the Russian Federation in August last year. The use of a chemical nerve agent of the novichok group was confirmed by laboratories in France, Germany and Sweden, as well as the OPCW itself.

The OPCW Technical Secretariat had expressed its readiness to assist the Russian Federation and deploy its experts in order to help clarify the case. Therefore, it is very disappointing and regrettable that the Russian Federation decided in December to withdraw its request for technical assistance.

We reiterate our call on the Russian Federation to fully comply with its obligations under the Convention. We urge the authorities of the Russian Federation to conduct an impartial and thorough investigation in full transparency and to bring those responsible to justice.

Accountability for the use of chemical weapons must be established and upheld. Impunity for these crimes must never be accepted.

Mr Chairperson, allow me to mention at the end this statement an issue that is at the core of Sweden's foreign policy - gender equality. We commend the Director-General for his efforts to safeguard balanced gender representation in the OPCW. A lot has happened, a lot remains to be done. Sweden is fully committed to assist the Organisation in achieving this goal in the near future. The Swedish Embassy in The Hague, together with the Technical Secretariat, organised a webinar on 11 November 2020, co-chaired by Director-General Arias and I, on 'Achieving Gender Balance at the Disarmament Table'. It met a very positive response.

We believe that discussing the challenges and opportunities for achieving equal representation in an open and transparent way is a valuable contribution in supporting the OPCW's work on gender representation and gender mainstreaming. We look forward to our continued cooperation and invite other States Parties to engage actively in these endeavours.

Thank you.