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FRANCE

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR LUIS VASSY
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE FRENCH REPUBLIC TO THE OPCW
AT THE NINETY-EIGHTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairperson,
Mr Director-General,
Distinguished Ambassadors,

The Syrian chemical dossier, 10 years after the beginning of the conflict, remains on the agenda of this Executive Council (“the Council”). The latest developments with regard to Syria’s cooperation with the Technical Secretariat (“the Secretariat”) are concerning, to say the least.

Far from setting an example in the past, we note a clear slowdown and ever greater obstacles: the refusal to issue a visa for the liaison officer posted in Damascus; the postponement of the deployment of the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT), followed by a refusal to issue a visa for one of the team members; and the extension of the Tripartite Agreement between Syria, the OPCW and UNOPS for merely three months, among other things.

We recall that every State Party to the Chemical Weapons Convention (“the Convention”) undertakes to cooperate with the Secretariat in accordance with paragraph 7 of Article VII of the Convention.

Let me reaffirm this today: the decision “Addressing the Possession and Use of Chemical Weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic” (C-25/DEC.9, dated 21 April 2021) taken in April by the Conference of the States Parties (“the Conference”) at its Twenty-Fifth Session is not irreversible, as our ultimate goal is the dismantling of the Syrian chemical arsenal to prevent any further use of these weapons. We call on Syria to resume cooperation with the Secretariat and to comply with its international obligations. This is the only possible way for Syria to regain its rights and privileges at the OPCW, as provided for in the decision adopted by the Conference at its Twenty-Fifth Session.

Beyond that, we recall that only through a credible, viable, and inclusive political solution in line with United Nations Security Council resolution 2254 (2015) will it be possible to end the Syrian conflict.

The nerve agent attack against Mr Alexei Navalny on 20 August 2020 on the territory of the Russian Federation was shocking to us all.

France shares the conclusions of several of its European partners and the Secretariat regarding the facts surrounding this poisoning with a military nerve agent of the novichok group. We condemn in the strongest possible terms the shocking and reckless use of such an agent.



The use of chemical weapons anywhere, at any time, by anyone, and under any circumstances is unacceptable and contravenes international norms against the use of such weapons.

We regret that Russia has not provided any credible information about this event. It is imperative that light be shed on the circumstances of this crime and those who perpetrated it, that those responsible be held accountable, and that all measures be taken to prevent the recurrence of such attacks.

At the risk of repeating ourselves, there is one truth that must be recalled at the meetings of our Organisation's policy-making organs: the OPCW is a fundamental pillar of our collective security. Indeed, the Convention, as we approach the twenty-fifth anniversary of its entry into force, entrusts the Secretariat with verification missions, in the interest of all States Parties and their citizens. France is deeply committed to the conduct of these inspections, and it is essential that the exceptional reduction in the number of inspections in light of the current health context does not hinder implementation of the Convention. This is why we call on States Parties to show flexibility in order to allow the resumption of these inspections on their national territory, to the extent and as soon as possible. We wish to thank the teams of the Secretariat for their time and effort and for the bilateral consultations undertaken in this regard.

In view of the concerning security developments that we currently face, we have a responsibility to provide the Organisation with the budgetary means essential to the fulfilment of its mandate, in particular to prevent the re-emergence of the use of chemical weapons. Consequently, France has decided to make an exception to the zero nominal growth policy applied to budgets of international organisations and to support the draft budget as proposed by the Director-General on 2 July. However, this increase in the level of assessed contributions is not sustainable over the long haul and must be accompanied by the Secretariat's measures to optimise and streamline operations.

It is also the duty of each State Party to enable the Secretariat to perform its tasks by paying their assessed contributions on time. It is essential that States in arrears comply with their obligations as soon as possible.

We have all realised that the pandemic that we are experiencing must lead us to rethink and adapt our working methods. It is essential to define solutions together so that the Organisation can fulfil its mandate, including under exceptional circumstances. We therefore reiterate our support for the initiative launched by Germany in this regard and hope that we will be able to find a consensus together. This draft decision is aimed at ensuring the continuity of our work, an objective that unites us all as States Parties to the Convention.

We welcome the willingness of the Director-General to continue his mandate for four more years and, in so doing, to continue with the efforts undertaken in the fight against the re-emergence of the use of chemical weapons. France reiterates its full trust in him and in all the members of the Secretariat, who every day work towards the objective we have set for ourselves, that is a world finally free from chemical weapons.

I would ask that this statement be considered an official document of this session of the Council and that it be published on the OPCW's internal and external servers.

Thank you.