

Statement by H.E. Kateřina Sequensová, Permanent Representative of the
Czech Republic to the OPCW

at the Ninety – Ninth Session of the Executive Council

8-11 March 2022

Mrs. Chairperson, Mr. Director-General, distinguished delegates,

The Czech Republic fully aligns itself with the statement of the European Union and would like to use this opportunity to underline a few points in its national capacity.

We would like to pay tribute to the Chairperson, H.E. Ambassador Abdelouahab Bellouki of Morocco for his excellent guidance that allowed us to conduct meetings of the Executive Council under challenging circumstance. We further would like to thank Ambassador Gudrun Linger of Germany for taking over the role with a view to ensure continuity and for all the preparatory efforts that allow us to conduct this meeting. Let me also express our sincere appreciation for all the hard work of the Director General, Fernando Arias, and the Technical Secretariat under on-going challenging circumstances posed by the COVID-19. We have full confidence in you, Mr. Director General and in your staff and we very much value your professionalism and independence.

On 29th April 2022 we will celebrate the 25th anniversary of the entry into force of the Chemical Weapons Convention. Apart from the positive news that 99% of the declared chemical weapons were destroyed, we unfortunately witness also their use. We believe that the Fifth Review Conference will enable us to assess the past activities and measures taken in order to implement the Convention, but also to discuss the way forward. The Czech Republic expresses its readiness to engage in a constructive discussion of the Open Ended Working Group.

Syrian Arab Republic has breached its obligations stemming from the Convention, including by failure to provide a complete declaration, but also by repeated use of chemical weapons confirmed by among others the UN – OPCW JIM and OPCW IIT. Therefore, a decision to suspend the voting rights and privileges of Syria was adopted by the 25th Conference of States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention. By resolving outstanding issues, providing all relevant documents to update the initial declaration and adhering to the norms of the Convention by Syria, the decision might be reversed.

The Czech Republic commends the work of the OPCW FFM and appreciates its two last reports confirming the use of chemical weapons in Marea on 1st September 2015 and in Kafr Zeita on 1st October 2016. We condemn such violation of the Convention in the strongest terms and reiterate that those responsible should be held accountable. In this context we look forward to the reports of the OPCW IIT and once again would like to stress the support for the impartial investigation conducted by the OPCW IIT.

We are concerned with the continued non-cooperation of Syria with the Technical Secretariat by preventing the issuance of visas to all OPCW staff on time and in full as presented by the Technical Secretariat on 23 February. Cooperation is one of the cornerstones of the Convention and therefore we reiterate our call on the Syrian Arab Republic to fully cooperate with the Technical Secretariat, including issuance of visas to all OPCW staff, including all members of the DAT, on time in accordance with the Convention and UNSCR 2018.

The Czech Republic is deeply concerned by the assassination attempt on Alexei Navalny who was poisoned on the territory of the Russian Federation by a chemical nerve agent of the “Novichok” group. The attack requires full attention of this Council. We also would like to express our concern that the Russian Federation still has not credibly disclosed the circumstances of the attack despite the international calls in this regard and the responsibility of the Russian Federation to do so, as it took place on its territory. Upholding norms of international law is a key component of the rules-based international order. Hence, we fully align ourselves with the findings of the report issued by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on 10 January 2022 and call upon Russian Federation to comply with its obligations under Convention.

Mrs. Chairperson,

Allow us to turn now to the current situation in Ukraine. The false accusations by the Russian Federation of possession of unknown chemicals by Ukraine as mentioned among others by the Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu in his statement in December last year are contradictory to the spirit of cooperation embodied in the Chemical Weapons Convention. The Czech Republic is deeply concerned by such unsubstantiated statements pointing at alleged violation of the Convention by one of its States Parties. The Convention is a cornerstone of the international non-proliferation and disarmament regime and overarching global architecture of peace and security. As such, the Convention was concluded in order to contribute to the realization of the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations. By unprovoked and unjustified military aggression against Ukraine the Russian Federation commits a gross violation of international law and principles of the UN Charter and threatens the international peace and security. The Czech Republic condemns the act of aggression by Russian Federation and demands that Russia immediately cease its military action, withdraw its forces and military equipment from Ukraine, respect Ukraine’s territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence within its internationally recognized borders and stop with false accusations and disinformation.

With respect to the capacity-building, the Czech Republic is a long-term supporter of the OPCW protection and assistance activities based on Article X of the Convention. Our support is both financial and personal by providing voluntary contributions and conducting trainings respectively. We look forward to returning to in-person trainings soon as this would allow participants of the trainings apart from gaining theoretical knowledge also obtain practical experience.

The Czech Republic underlines the key role that the Center for Chemistry and Technology will play in strengthening the OPCW’s capabilities to address new and emerging chemical weapons threats, enhance investigative capabilities and support capacity building for OPCW Member States. We express our gratitude to the Technical Secretariat for its efforts to keep the project on track and commend the Director-General for the progress achieved.

We recognize that the COVID-19 has changed our lives and our working environment, too. Moving to an on-line world was the only viable alternative to get the work done. We therefore support the German initiative on Executive Council business continuity as it enable the OPCW to adapt to new situation in order to fulfil its tasks. We support the decision and hope for its adoption.

Last but not least, the Czech Republic supports the efforts to amend the OPCW Tenure Policy in order to enhance the ability of the Technical Secretariat to ensure continued implementation of the Convention by keeping the expertise needed.

We would like to ask that this statement be designed an official document of this Council session and posted on both the external server and public website.