

## **UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

### **STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR JOSEPH MANSO PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE OPCW AT THE NINETY-NINTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Madam Chairperson,  
Mr. Director-General,  
Distinguished Ambassadors,

As we gather for the 99<sup>th</sup> Session of the Executive Council, I am saddened that it is taking place against the backdrop of Russia's premeditated, unprovoked, and unjustified war against Ukraine – the largest and most destructive military invasion of a sovereign nation in Europe in nearly 80 years. The United States reaffirms its unwavering commitment to Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and expresses its solidarity with both the government and the people of Ukraine.

In the lead-up to this war undertaken by the Russian Federation, some of its officials made allegations targeted at the United States, questioning our commitment to the Chemical Weapons Convention. Let me be clear in saying that these allegations are preposterous and our commitment to the Chemical Weapons Convention is iron-clad. We can see those allegations for what they truly are, and so often are from Russia - a means to distract from its transgressions and aggression.

Let us take a brief account of those transgressions. Russia has invaded the sovereign territory of Ukraine and repeatedly used chemical weapons in recent years. It used a Novichok nerve agent against Sergei and Yulia Skripal in Salisbury, the United Kingdom, in March 2018, causing the death of a British citizen and costing millions of dollars to contain and decontaminate the city. Russia used a Novichok again in August 2020, on its own territory, against opposition figure Aleksey Navalny.

Regarding the latter incident, the Russian Federation has yet to provide a sufficient response to the questions asked under Article IX of the Convention by 45 States Parties, despite repeated requests. The international outcry over this brazen attack has only grown larger, and at the 26<sup>th</sup> Conference of the States Parties (CSP-26) in November 2021, 55 countries representing all regional groups urged the Russian Federation to provide the necessary clarification in accordance with its obligations under the Convention.

The United States also continues to have concerns regarding Russia's assistance to the Syrian Arab Republic regarding the regime's use of chlorine in Douma in April 2018. Russia's campaign of disinformation surrounding the circumstances of these events is nothing but a shameless attempt to sow confusion about its own actions and shield the Syrian regime from

accountability for its chemical weapons use. As the last months have shown, Russia's use of disinformation is also predictable.

As the recent, incredibly detailed, Technical Secretariat presentation on the status of Syria-related activities and, before that, more than 100 monthly reports by the Director-General (DG) make clear, Syria has not been candid about its chemical weapons program. Seven years and 24 rounds of consultations later, Syria's declaration still cannot be considered "complete and accurate."

The DG's latest report also points out that the Assad regime continues to impede the work of the Declaration Assessment Team by denying the issuance of visas to all team members. No amount of visa denial will, however, prevent the OPCW from continuing its work and shedding light on Syria's continued flouting of its CWC obligations.

The Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) has independently found the Assad regime responsible for four separate instances of chemical weapons use. These are in addition to four separate instances of chemical weapons use attributed to Syria by the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) before Russia blocked the UN Security Council from renewing the JIM's mandate for reporting facts that Russia found inconvenient.

One of the repeated lies put forward by Syria and Russia has been that the push for accountability for the use of chemical weapons in Syria has been "politicized" or is "biased" against Syria. The OPCW, and the JIM before it, have had to focus their attention on Syria because Syria has repeatedly used chemical weapons. While this may be an inconvenient truth for Syria and Russia, it is not bias.

The United States has full confidence in and strongly supports the OPCW's work on the Syria chemical weapons issue, which has consistently been done in an impartial and highly professional manner. The recent reports of the Fact-Finding Mission on the September 1, 2015, attack in Marea and on the October 1, 2016, attack in Kafr Zeita are more examples of the thorough and proficient work of the OPCW. The IIT now has the responsibility to determine the perpetrators of these attacks in the same manner.

Thanks to the overwhelming adoption of its first ever biennial budget, the OPCW will continue to tackle the threat from chemical weapons use while also providing States Parties with technical assistance and maintaining a robust inspection regime. In addition to providing the Organization with the financial resources it needs, several important initiatives are underway to strengthen the institution further. Current plans for use of the new ChemTech Center and to update the OPCW's tenure policy, ensure business continuity during times of emergency, promote geographic balance within the workforce, and institutionalize gender and diversity best practices will help the Organization thrive in the years to come.

Turning to another issue, I would like to commend States Parties for taking action at CSP-26 to address the aerosolized use of central nervous system-acting chemicals and make clear that such

use is understood to be inconsistent with law enforcement purposes as a “purpose not prohibited” under the Convention. This forward-thinking decision by States Parties sends a strong signal to countries that they cannot hide offensive work on such chemicals under the guise of legitimate purposes under the Convention.

The United States remains steadfast in its commitment to destroy the remaining U.S. chemical weapons stockpile in Pueblo, Colorado, and Blue Grass, Kentucky. To further demonstrate its commitment to cooperation and transparency, the United States will host later this month a virtual U.S. Chemical Demilitarization Transparency Event for which regional groups’ delegates have been invited. We hope to host an in-person Executive Council Visit once public health and safety concerns improve.

In conclusion, I call on us all to recall the purposes for which we entered into this Convention. Among them is our determination “for the sake of all mankind, to exclude completely the possibility of the use of chemical weapons.” Unfortunately, though, the actions of a few bad actors are preventing us from achieving our goal. As States Parties, we must continue to work together to uphold the Convention, and to hold accountable those who do not.

I ask that this statement be designated an official document of this Council session and posted on both the external server and the public website.