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CZECH REPUBLIC

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR KATEŘINA SEQUENSOVÁ
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC TO THE OPCW
AT THE NINETY-NINTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Ms 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 (“the Council”) under challenging circumstances. We would further like to thank Ambassador Gudrun Lingner of Germany for taking over the role with a view to ensuring 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 (“the Secretariat”) under ongoing challenging circumstances posed by 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 29 April 2022 we will celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the entry into force of the Chemical Weapons Convention (“the Convention”). Apart from the positive news that 99% of the declared chemical weapons were destroyed, we unfortunately also witness 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 on the Open-Ended Working Group.

The Syrian Arab Republic has breached its obligations stemming from the Convention, including by its failure to provide a complete declaration, but also by repeated use of chemical weapons confirmed by, inter alia, the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism and the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT). Therefore, a decision to suspend the voting rights and privileges of Syria was adopted by the Twenty-Fifth Conference of the States Parties to the Convention. By Syria resolving any outstanding issues, providing all relevant documents to update the initial declaration, and adhering to the norms of the Convention, the decision might be reversed.



The Czech Republic commends the work of the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission in Syria and appreciates its last two reports confirming the use of chemical weapons in Marea on 1 September 2015 and in Kafr Zeita on 1 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 IIT and once again would like to stress the support for the impartial investigation conducted by the IIT.

We are concerned with the continued non-cooperation of Syria with the Secretariat by preventing the issuance of visas to all OPCW staff on time and in full as presented by the 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 Secretariat, including issuance of visas to all OPCW staff, including all members of the Declaration Assessment Team, on time in accordance with the Convention and United Nations Security Council resolution 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 the full attention of this Council. We would also 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 the Russian Federation to comply with its obligations under the Convention.

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 Sergei Shoigu in his statement in December last year, are contradictory to the spirit of cooperation embodied in the Convention. The Czech Republic is deeply concerned by such unsubstantiated statements pointing at an 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 realisation 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 United Nations Charter and threatens international peace and security. The Czech Republic condemns the act of aggression by the 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 recognised borders, and stops with false accusations and disinformation.

With respect to 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 the participants of the trainings, apart from gaining theoretical knowledge, also to obtain practical experience.

The Czech Republic underlines the key role that the Centre 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 Secretariat for its efforts to keep the project on track and commend the Director-General for the progress achieved.

We recognise that COVID-19 has changed our lives and our working environment, too. Moving to an online world was the only viable alternative to get the work done. We therefore support the German initiative on Council business continuity as it enables the OPCW to adapt to new situations 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 Secretariat to ensure continued implementation of the Convention by keeping the expertise needed.

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

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