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**FRANCE**

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

Madam Chairperson,  
Mr Director-General,  
Distinguished Ambassadors,

France aligns itself with the statement of the European Union. Allow me to add the following remarks in my national capacity.

Madam Chairperson,

I should like to start by thanking H.E. Ambassador Abdelouahab Bellouki of Morocco, who has led our discussions in the Executive Council (“the Council”) over the past few months. We also thank H.E. Ambassador Gudrun Lingner of Germany, acting Chairperson of the Council, for leading the preparation of our work for this Ninety-Ninth Session. We warmly welcome H.E. Ambassador Eniola Olaitan Ajayi of Nigeria, who will preside over our session. We assure you of France’s full support in the exercise of your duties.

As this Ninety-Ninth Session of the Council opens, international law has once again been violated. France condemns in the strongest possible terms the military invasion launched by Russia against Ukraine on 24 February. This premeditated, deliberate and unprovoked aggression, which contravenes all of the commitments undertaken by the Russian authorities, is a violation of the United Nations Charter and the founding principles of the European and international order.

We reaffirm our unwavering support for the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders, and call upon Russia to immediately cease this war and to withdraw the Russian forces from Ukrainian territory.

We also condemn all Russian disinformation campaigns, especially regarding allegations of provocations using chemical agents in Ukraine.

The Syrian chemical dossier remains at the very core of our Organisation’s concerns, more than eight years after Syria’s accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention (“the Convention”).



We welcome the recent publication of two reports of the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) and take due note of their findings. These two reports, very well-documented and whose conclusions are based on a body of corroborating evidence, demonstrate that chemical weapons were used in Marea on 1 September 2015 and in Kafr Zeita on 1 October 2016. The confirmation of these allegations of use is particularly alarming. Marea and Kafr Zeita add to the already long list of confirmed use of these heinous weapons.

The work of the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) to identify the perpetrators of these attacks is essential in the fight against impunity.

I cannot but lament once again the Syrian regime's persistent obstruction of the work of our Organisation. Under false pretexts, it thus aims to hamper the work of the Technical Secretariat ("the Secretariat"). For what reasons – I ask – if not out of fear of the results of the work of its teams? I wish here to commend the professionalism of those teams.

In fact, the Syrian regime has still not issued the necessary visas for the deployment of the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT), and continues to interfere in the choice of inspectors, making it impossible for the DAT to deploy since April.

This is unacceptable. We recall that Syria's obligation to cooperate is enshrined in paragraph 7 of Article VII of the Convention. It is also laid down in resolution 2118 (2013), adopted unanimously by the United Nations Security Council. The resolution explicitly requires that OPCW and United Nations personnel be provided with immediate and unfettered access to all sites on Syrian territory deemed relevant.

Yet, need I repeat, the measures resulting from the April decision of the Conference of the States Parties are not irreversible. The rights and privileges that were suspended in April can be reinstated. This requires the regime to comply with its international obligations and to cooperate actively and in good faith with the OPCW.

Beyond that, we recall that only a credible, viable and inclusive political solution in line with United Nations Security Council resolution 2254 (2015) can bring an end to the Syrian conflict. Everyone here is aware of the Syrian regime's guilt and of the shameful acts for which it is responsible. This is why France is firmly committed to the fight against impunity. The victims today are turning to the national jurisdictions. I say this in all seriousness: the criminals will have no respite. This is the message we defend with our partners within the International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons.

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 the poisoning with a military nerve agent of the novichok group. We condemn in the strongest terms the shocking and reckless use of such an agent and reaffirm that 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. 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.

It is first and foremost the responsibility of the Russian Federation to initiate a credible and transparent investigation into this criminal act on its territory, against a Russian citizen, by means of a nerve agent from the family of agents developed by Russia.

As you know, the Permanent Representation of the Russian Federation sent a note verbale to my country via the Secretariat, which was received on 8 October 2021. In accordance with the provisions of paragraph 2 of Article IX of the Convention, France replied within the prescribed time limit, through a note verbale dated 18 October 2021. We are still waiting for the Russian Federation to provide credible explanations about this assassination attempt.

We have all realised that the pandemic we are experiencing must lead us to rethink and adapt our working methods. It is essential to find solutions together so that the Organisation can fulfil its mandate, including under exceptional circumstances. We therefore reiterate our support for the initiative launched in this regard, which is being supported by an increasing number of States Parties. While we obviously hope that our meetings will be held in their habitual format as soon as conditions allow, we hope that together we will be able to find consensus on this draft decision. It is indeed aimed at ensuring the continuity of our work, a goal that unites us all as States Parties to the Convention.

We will soon mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the entry into force of this Convention. I should like to underscore that this is a pivotal moment for our Organisation. We are indeed at a turning point, since one of the initial objectives of the Convention will soon be fulfilled: 99% of chemical weapons stockpiles declared by possessor States have been destroyed.

Nevertheless, new threats to international security are emerging, most notably the re-emergence of the use of chemical weapons. Such challenges require that the OPCW continue to adapt. It is against this backdrop that we are looking forward to the Fifth Review Conference in 2023, the success of which depends on our collective responsibility. France stands ready to contribute actively to the preparatory work of the Open-Ended Working Group, in an open and constructive spirit.

We call on all delegations to engage in these discussions and to cooperate together, in order to maintain the full relevance of our Convention. It constitutes one of the greatest multilateral success stories in the field of disarmament. It is now up to us to defend it. We owe this to our citizens, whom we have promised to protect from these horrendous weapons.

I request that this statement be considered as an official document of this session of the Council and that it be posted on Catalyst and the OPCW official website.

Thank you.

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