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FRANCE

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR LUIS VASSY
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE FRENCH REPUBLIC TO THE OPCW
AT THE 100TH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr 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.

Mr Chairperson,

As you are chairing your first regular session of the Executive Council (the Council), I would first like to congratulate you on your election. The French delegation fully trusts you to lead our discussions in the coming months and to thereby contribute to the success of the work of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

I wish to condemn in the strongest possible terms the baseless allegations made by Russia, which have proliferated in the past few months. We deplore the fact that Russia is using the OPCW as a platform for propaganda purposes. In doing so, Russia seeks to justify the unjustifiable, namely its war of aggression against Ukraine. The notes verbales sent by Russia are part of this strategy of disinformation and information manipulation.

This is not Russia's first attempt to do this. Its repeated attacks on the OPCW Technical Secretariat (the Secretariat) are aimed at discrediting the Organisation, so as to sow doubt about the results of its work. But no one here is fooled: we have already seen such manoeuvres on many occasions in this forum, especially in regard to Syria. France reiterates its full support and confidence in the Director-General and in the Secretariat, whose independence and impartiality are known to all here.

It is indeed with regret that I must once again address the topic of the Syrian chemical dossier. Clearly, the Syrian regime does not wish to cooperate. This is unacceptable. We recall that the obligation to cooperate is enshrined both in paragraph 7 of Article VII of the Chemical Weapons Convention (the Convention), to which Syria has acceded, and in resolution 2118 (2013), which requires that OPCW and United Nations personnel be provided with immediate and unhindered access to all sites deemed relevant on its territory.

We must repeat that the measures resulting from the April 2021 decision of the Conference of the States Parties are not irreversible. The rights and privileges that were suspended can be recovered. This requires that the regime comply with its international obligations and cooperate with the OPCW actively and in good faith. The regular consultations on the Syrian chemical dossier prior to the Council sessions allow all States Parties to observe that the Secretariat carries out its work in full transparency and with great professionalism.

France's support of the OPCW's work is consistent with its long-standing and continually renewed commitment to the fight against chemical weapons. In 2022, France decided to make a voluntary contribution of EUR 2.2 million to support the Organisation's activities in various areas.

Of that, EUR 1 million is earmarked for activities related to Syria, while EUR 500,000 has been allocated to assistance and protection measures to help Ukraine to address the threat of use of chemical weapons in the context of the Russian military aggression. The remaining EUR 700,000 covers international cooperation and training projects, which are also essential for the future of the Organisation. This includes capacity-building projects for French-speaking African countries, aimed at responding to threats from non-State actors.

We believe that the OPCW is the appropriate forum to address the issue of chemical terrorism, and we are convinced that more can be done on this matter within the OPCW. We look forward to working in a committed and constructive manner on this topic with all interested delegations.

Direct bilateral cooperation between States Parties is also essential for the OPCW. While our Partnership Programme was interrupted because of the pandemic, I am very honoured by the warm welcome extended to the French representatives this year by the National Authority of Côte d'Ivoire. I sincerely believe that the National Authorities of our two countries have learned from one another and were able to share best practices in Convention implementation.

Finally, I wish to thank H.E. Ambassador Lauri Kuusing for his outstanding dedication as Chairperson of the Open-Ended Working Group for the Preparation of the Review Conference that will be held in 2023. We know that he can also count on the invaluable support of all members of the Bureau in his work. France thanks them as well, and is pleased that the first two meetings of the Group have been held. We stand ready to contribute actively to the Group's work and wish to cooperate with all regional groups so as to chart a course for our Organisation that is adapted to the future challenges it must face.

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

Thank you.

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