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ALBANIA

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR ADIA SAKIQI
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA TO THE
OPCW AT THE 100TH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Delegation of the Republic of Albania, please first allow me to extend our heartfelt congratulations to the Chairperson of the Executive Council, H.E. Ambassador Ziad Al Atiyah of Saudi Arabia. Mr Chairperson, you have our full support and confidence that your professionalism and experience will help us to reach a successful conclusion of this 100th Session of the Executive Council.

We take this opportunity to thank the OPCW Director-General, Ambassador Fernando Arias, for his valuable guidance and leadership, and to deeply commend the professionalism and integrity of the OPCW Technical Secretariat (the Secretariat) in implementing the Chemical Weapons Convention (the Convention) and tasks assigned by the States Parties.

The Republic of Albania holds a non-permanent member seat in the United Nations Security Council since June 2021. In the capacity of member of the Security Council, it is crucial to understand and stipulate the importance of maintaining the highest possible standards in the promotion and protection of human rights. This principle is painfully important especially in present times, as we are facing aggression and conflict against a sovereign country, increased uncertainty and mistrust on the success rate of multilateralism. The Republic of Albania addresses these issues in Security Council, mindful of whom we are and our strategic political alliances as a member of NATO, as a European Union candidate country, and as a country that held the Chairpersonship of the OSCE in 2020.

In our capacity as member of the United Nations Security Council, we support receiving regular briefings on situations where serious human rights violations occur, and we will focus our efforts on defining the type of measures that the Security Council should take to respond to them. The OPCW and the United Nations Security Council work in complementarity with each other and cooperate frequently to achieve similar goals. In this aspect, Albania firmly believes that close cooperation between government stakeholders is the key to success and will continue to work for what we believe is worth fighting for in favour of peace, democracy, protection of human rights and upholding international law.



Mr Chairperson, it is with a heavy heart that we must all remind ourselves that this is the second Executive Council of this year that we are attending, while a terrible war continues to occur in our doorstep, and without any end in sight. This 100th Session of the Executive Council of the OPCW is meeting while Russia's unprovoked and unjustified military aggression against Ukraine moves forward. In this regard, Albania strongly condemns the ongoing attacks of Russian armed forces on the territory of Ukraine and wishes to reiterate our full support for the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders. This conflict has caused many, many days of senseless outspread destruction, mounting civilian casualties and continued pain inflicted on millions of Ukrainian people. Albania condemns in the strongest possible terms Russia's armed aggression, which grossly violates international law and the United Nations Charter, and undermines European and international peace and security. The United Nations General Assembly, in its resolutions of 2 March and 24 March 2022, has deplored in the strongest terms the aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine in violation of Article 2(4) of the United Nations Charter. It demands that the Russian Federation immediately ceases its use of force against Ukraine and refrains from any further unlawful threat or use of force against any Member State. Furthermore, it also deplores the involvement of Belarus in this unlawful use of force and calls upon it to abide by its international obligations. These resolutions send a powerful message to Russia and Belarus that they are isolated and alone in their actions.

As a member of United Nations Security Council, Albania gives top priority to combating sexual violence in conflicts and promoting the participation of women activists and survivors, open debates on this issue with all Security Council members and has intensified the approach of the Security Council towards the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda. Furthermore, Albania has been very active in pushing forward the need for action to end the unprovoked attacks by the Russian State against Ukraine and is one of the many countries that immediately referred the situation in Ukraine to be investigated by an independent international court.

The States Parties to the OPCW are the guardians of the Convention, which in turn, forms the basis for global non-proliferation and disarmament efforts. This goal should drive us, the States Parties to not only uphold the principles of the Convention, but to simultaneously refrain from misusing it as a tool to pose any baseless or unfounded claims against each other. In this regard, we call upon Russia to cease with the ongoing disinformation campaigns and unsubstantiated allegations against Ukraine regarding the use of chemical weapons while risking exposure of the population to toxic chemicals through deliberate attacks against civilian industrial facilities. It is well established that Ukraine is a responsible State Party to the Convention and is in full compliance with the Convention. The Republic of Albania would also like to extend full support to the Secretariat staff of the OPCW against baseless accusations and attacks on their integrity and professionalism in the exercise of their duties.

The Republic of Albania praises the efforts of the Director-General and the Secretariat to ensure that continuous progress is achieved on the Syrian Arab Republic dossier, and we wish to commend and confirm our support to the Director-General's steadfast efforts to engage in discourse with the Syrian Arab Republic authorities on the matter at hand. Continued refusal to issue visas for Secretariat experts and preventing their deployment on the ground can only delay and hamper their work on the ground. We urge the Syrian Arab Republic to issue visas without delay for all staff members of the OPCW, including all the members of the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT), in accordance with the obligations of States parties under Article VII paragraph 7 of the Convention and United Nations Security Council resolution 2118.

As a State Party to the Convention, we have supported the decision by the Twenty-Fifth Session of the Conference of the States Parties on suspending the voting rights and privileges of the Syrian Arab Republic due to Syria's failure to comply with the Convention. In order to reverse the decision, Syria needs to resolve the pending issues, declare the full extent of its chemical weapons programme, and return to full compliance with the Convention. Albania reiterates that any use of chemical weapons is simply unacceptable. Impunity for the use of chemical weapons cannot be tolerated. We strongly believe that it is important for the Convention to remain capable of responding to new and emerging threats.

The failure of the Syrian Arab Republic authorities to fulfil international obligations imposed by the Convention is substantiated through comprehensive and thorough investigations carried out by the Joint OPCW-UN Joint Investigation Mechanism (JIM), as well as the OPCW DAT, Fact-Finding Missions (FFM) and the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT). In this context, we want to take a moment to outline that we have previously expressed our concern with the continuous breach of its obligations by the Syrian regime, which was evidenced through comprehensive and thorough investigations conducted by IIT. Albania wishes to extend its support to the of the IIT and looks forward to being informed on the IIT's next reports. We encourage the IIT team to continue their crucial contribution to identify clear violations of the Convention and its core principles.

Mr Chairperson, addressing the threat of chemical weapons use is the foundation on which the Convention was first established, and it is essential for upholding international legal norms. Albania joins many other States Parties in expressing strong concerns that the Russian Federation has not reacted to international calls, including those reiterated on the occasion of the Ninety-Ninth Session of the Executive Council and during the Twenty-Sixth Session of the Conference of the States Parties in December 2021, regarding the use of the toxic chemical novichok as a weapon against Mr Alexei Navalny on 20 August 2020. The use of such a chemical nerve agent from the novichok group, which is banned under the Convention, was confirmed by two OPCW-designated laboratories, as well as by three independent specialised laboratories in Germany, France and Sweden. We call on the Russian Federation to cooperate with the OPCW and ensure that the perpetrators are identified and punished. We wish to reiterate the previous request to the Russian Federation to provide answers to the questions posed by 45 States Parties in the framework of Article IX, paragraph 2 of the Convention on 5th October 2021, and to disclose without further delay the circumstances of the assassination attempt against Alexei Navalny.

As States Parties of the Convention, we recently marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of the entry-into-force of the Convention. Albania positively notes the successful and verified destruction of 99% of the chemical weapons stockpiles declared by possessor States. Despite the progress made in this regard, the re-emergence of the use of chemical weapons is a significant threat to global peace and security.

The Fifth Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties to Review the Operation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (Fifth Review Conference) will provide a suitable platform to consider how best to ensure the continued relevance of the Convention, as a key instrument of the international non-proliferation and disarmament regime. To this end, Albania wishes to extend its full and active support to the Chairperson of the Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG), H.E. Ambassador Lauri Kuusing of Estonia, for his excellent guidance and leadership to the work of the OEWG and trust that his suggested thematic work programme

will allow all delegations to effectively express their expectations and priorities regarding the variety of topics at stake for the future of the OPCW.

We believe that capacity building is essential to assist States Parties in fulfilling their obligations under the Convention and to keep pace with rapidly advancing developments in science and technology. We stand ready to continue supporting capacity-building efforts at the national and regional levels. In addition, we would also like to acknowledge the efforts and continued dedication of the Secretariat to the Centre for Chemistry and Technology (ChemTech Centre) project, and express our belief that the centre will further enhance the Organisation's ability to fulfil its core tasks, as set out in the Convention.

Albania recognises and appreciates the long-term efforts of the Director-General to further advance gender balance and geographical distribution of positions in the Secretariat. We are also appreciative of the initiative of the Director-General pertaining to the current gender and diversity audit, and would like to thank the Director-General for his commitment to improve gender mainstreaming within the OPCW.

Furthermore, Albania positively supports the efforts of the OPCW to amend its current tenure policy, with a view to improving the Secretariat's ability to maintain key expertise required to ensure the continued implementation of the Convention.

Mr. Chairperson, in addressing the unprecedented new challenges of Covid-19, which we are all still recovering from, ensuring global compliance with the Convention must remain a top priority. We would encourage the Secretariat and States Parties to take targeted and tailored measures to achieve full universality. It is thus important to take into account experience and best practices, including those of other relevant international organisations, so that we are all better prepared to deal with unforeseen circumstances in the present, as well as in the future. The aim should be to enable the OPCW to carry out its core activities—in particular the convening of Executive Council meetings—in the event of exceptional circumstances, whether in The Hague, or remotely through the use of virtual meeting technology. Albania fully supports the further refined draft decision (Rev.2) tabled by a cross-regional group of States Parties including Germany. We encourage all members of the OPCW Executive Council to join consensus and to support the adoption of this decision.

I would kindly ask you to consider this statement as an official document and post it on the OPCW external server and public website. Thank you.

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