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**RUSSIAN FEDERATION**

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR A. V. SHULGIN  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION TO THE  
OPCW AT THE NINETY-EIGHTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairperson, Mr Director-General, distinguished delegates,

First and foremost, we would like to welcome Ambassador Abdelouahab Bellouki of Morocco. Thanks to your many years of diplomatic experience, the activities of the Executive Council have been operating as normal in spite of the continuing COVID-19 pandemic, without interruption and as scheduled. Allow me to assure you, Mr Chairperson, of my full support and willingness to collaborate constructively to ensure that this last regular session of the Council proceeds successfully.

We will soon need to review the results of the annual activities of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). It must be acknowledged that we are bearing witness to a true crisis in a period of the OPCW's history that, due to the efforts of a small group of countries, is sinking deeper into dirty political games. The so-called Navalny case is a clear example of such. We categorically deny the fabricated accusations against our country. The Federal Republic of Germany has not provided one reasonable response to the eight official requests from the Prosecutor General of the Russian Federation regarding the provision of international legal assistance within the framework of the European Convention of 1959. Similar requests from the Prosecutor General of Russia to France and Sweden have also been left unsatisfied. Germany also did not respond as it should have to Russia's request under Article IX of the Chemical Weapons Convention. Moreover, our German partners ignored the proposals from the Russian National Medical Chamber and parliamentarians to work together to get to the bottom of what took place. Incidentally, we waited in vain for any assistance from the OPCW Technical Secretariat as provided for under paragraph 38(e) of Article VIII of the Convention. And in light of the accusations being made by those who are stubbornly hiding the truth from Russia, this is above and beyond cynicism and the theatre of the absurd.

We have already borne witness to the attempts of certain countries to use the Organisation to settle political scores with undesirables for many years now, including with the example of the so-called Syrian chemical dossier. The assignment of attribution functions—in contradiction to the Convention and the OPCW's mandate, and to the detriment of the exclusive prerogative of the United Nations Security Council—is like a cancerous tumour causing increasing paralysis within the regular work of the OPCW, complicating agreements on important documents, and distorting the purely technical essence of this international body. In order to save our Organisation, it requires emergency “chemotherapy”—a return to the principle of consensus that once prevailed within these walls. And this is more than just thoughts and prayers—it is only by taking into account the interests of all States Parties that it will be



possible to develop effective measures in the field of non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The decision that was forced through by vote on depriving the Syrian Arab Republic of its rights and privileges under the Convention is just one confirmation of this; not only is it not viable, but it also drives the Organisation into a dead end, from which it is becoming increasingly difficult to find any exit. However, in spite of it all, Syria continues to conscientiously cooperate with the Secretariat within the framework of the mechanisms put into place by the Convention and the additional obligations it voluntarily undertook.

We welcome the continued constructive cooperation between Damascus and the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT). To date, an enormous amount of detailed work has been carried out. The Syrian authorities are meeting unprecedented measures of transparency—measures that go far beyond what is required by the Convention—regarding their former military chemical programme, which was completely eliminated under the control of the OPCW in line with the decision of the Thirty-Third Meeting of the Council and resolution 2118 (2013) of the United Nations Security Council. Thanks to this approach on the part of Damascus, Syria's initial declaration can now be considered the most verified declaration of all from States Parties to the Convention: in 2020 alone, Secretariat staff spent a total of 829 inspector days in Syria.

In reviewing the issue of potential gaps in the Syrian declaration, we urge the delegations to recall that this document was prepared in the altogether challenging and irregular conditions of military and political instability. The history of Syria's accession to the Convention clearly shows that it is only with the political resolve of all States Parties that it is possible to tackle any task. Damascus has repeatedly demonstrated good faith in its adherence to multilateral cooperation. We would recall that it is thanks to the desire and willingness to search for compromise-based solutions that we were previously able to resolve issues concerning the irretrievable losses in Libya of hundreds of tonnes of chemical weapons precursors. Any attempts to force through poorly thought-out and unilateral decisions constitute a one-way road to the continued destruction of our Organisation, which, I strongly believe, is not in anyone's interests. It is our view that the upcoming negotiations in October regarding the DAT, as well as the meeting between Director-General Arias and the head of Syria's National Authority, Mr Mekdad, will help bridge any gaps and find a way to resolve disputes.

It is completely clear that the "advanced practices" used by the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) investigating the use of chemical weapons in Syria violate the provisions of the Convention that govern verification matters. Moreover, these violations have become persistent and systemic. Instead of the independent collection of samples directly from the sites of incidents, Mission members receive them from unidentified persons in third countries, or from biased non-governmental sources financed by the opponents of Damascus, who cooperate with foreign special services. The analysis of samples by designated laboratories takes over six months, instead of the prescribed 15 days. Absolutely any sample analysis results are taken into account in the investigation, rather than only those demonstrating the same results from both designated laboratories that conducted the analyses. Finalised reports are not issued within 30 days after the Team's return to The Hague, but a year later, and sometimes longer. The violation of the rights of the inspected State has become commonplace; it not only does not receive the portion of the samples it is due, but it is essentially barred from observing the work of the inspection teams investigating the incidents of alleged use on its territory. Russia has repeatedly spoken of the need for fundamental reforms for the FFM. However, no steps have been taken to remedy the situation.

All this has ultimately led to the scandal that erupted in 2019 in connection with the machinations and manipulation of the FFM report on the incidents that took place in Douma, Syria, on 7 April 2018. The exposure of this report, which was customised according to political orders, struck a major blow to the reputation of our Organisation around the world. Two years passed since this shameful fact became known to the public. Nevertheless, the Secretariat still has not heeded the call of the States Parties, leading international experts, or non-governmental organisations to thoroughly investigate the matter.

We are deeply concerned by the information about the missile strike launched against the former chemical weapons production facility on Syrian territory and the destruction of two canisters stored there that were related to the incident in Douma. It is only logical to ask the question: who really stood to benefit from the destruction of criminal evidence of the provocation that took place in April 2018, leading to an act of aggression by a tripartite coalition in violation of the United Nations Charter?

Until such time as the story of the falsified FFM report on Douma is fully uncovered, there cannot be any trust in the objectivity of the investigations conducted under the aegis of the Secretariat. We once again call upon the Secretariat and the Director-General to bring definitive clarity to the matter, including by holding scientific discussions within the framework of the Scientific Advisory Board.

To a large degree, the Organisation's reputation depends on the actions of its Secretariat. We strongly believe that its leader must steadfastly defend the Convention and act objectively, impartially, and in the interests of all States Parties.

As we approach the OPCW's transition to a biennial budget cycle, we still have expectations that the Organisation will gradually be able to introduce budgetary discipline and implement an appropriate financial policy. We have indeed seen certain small steps in this direction: the draft Budget for 2023 includes the transfer of a portion from the COVID-19 Variability Fund to the regular budget. As a whole, this proposal meets the demands of the States Parties to integrate financing for all key activities into the regular budget. Unfortunately, this is what the improvements have been limited to. In the broader perspective, approaches to preparing the budget have remained the same, and they are not aligned with best practices at international organisations or the demands of an entire group of States concerning budgetary procedures. We have no choice but to state that the Secretariat, as before, adheres to two separate approaches: determining the level of budgetary expenses separately from the level of calculated contributions. This state of affairs is one of the reasons behind the deteriorating financial condition of the Organisation and is connected to the exacerbation of the long-term financial crisis. The problem of the 2019 budget deficit amounting to EUR 1.2 million was a red flag that only confirmed our fears.

We cannot agree with the Secretariat's execution of illegitimate activities aimed at implementing decision C-SS-4/DEC.3, dated 27 June 2018, or with the financing thereof both from the regular budget and from voluntary contributions.

The departure from the principle of zero-nominal growth gives rise to concern; first, this was due to the increase in personnel expenses without due account for the recommendations of the International Civil Service Commission. In the conditions of a global recession and an increased burden on national budgets due to the coronavirus pandemic, the proposal to increase contributions appears to be badly timed and unjustified.

We believe that the draft Budget for 2022 – 2023, as well as the corresponding draft decision, requires additional work on the part of the Secretariat, and should be based on more realistic financial and economic calculations as well as an optimised expense structure in order to identify additional potential savings.

We note the Secretariat's efforts in introducing Catalyst, a new online platform. We express our readiness to work closely with the Secretariat in the interests of improving this system to ensure that it becomes a reliable means of support for the work of the delegations.

The divide among States Parties in connection with the politicisation of the problem concerning the use of chemical weapons substantially lowers the effectiveness of our Organisation's work. Incidentally, preparations for the Fifth Review Conference will be under way next year. Now, like never before in the past five years, we must pool our efforts and try to approach this event with a positive agenda. Again, we urge all delegations to refrain from ultimatum-based rhetoric, to strive to search for compromise-based decisions, and to restore the spirit of consensus within the OPCW.

We request that this statement be circulated as an official document of the Ninety-Eighth Session of the Council and published on the Catalyst platform and the OPCW website.

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