

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR BONNIE JENKINS, UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE FOR ARMS CONTROL AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY, AT THE TWENTY-SEVENTH SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES

Mr. Chairperson,
Mr. Director-General,
Distinguished Ambassadors and Delegates,

It is my distinct honor to join you in person this year as we reflect on the many accomplishments of the Chemical Weapons Convention over the past 25 years. I would like to start off by saluting the tremendous contributions of Director-General Fernando Arias, who has provided stalwart leadership to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) during a period of unprecedented challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the Technical Secretariat for remaining steadfast in its dedication to the OPCW's mission.

Unfortunately, this occasion is overshadowed by the Russian Federation's premeditated, unprovoked, and unjustified war against Ukraine. Russia's ongoing disinformation campaign, alleging Ukrainian use or planned use of chemical weapons, directly impacts the Convention and this Organization. Russia's allegations are preposterous, unfounded, and alarming. Indeed, Russia's actions in Ukraine and its disinformation comes at a cost: Russia is losing credibility within the international community.

As we take stock of the important achievements of the past quarter century, including in the Fifth Review Conference process, we cannot be complacent or naïve regarding the challenges we face in the 21st century. The use and potential use of chemical weapons is not limited to Russia; it remains a global threat that must be countered at every available opportunity. We have collectively accomplished too much to allow the use of chemical weapons with impunity. I commend the Technical Secretariat and States Parties for their responses to Ukraine's requests for assistance and protection against the use or threat of use of chemical weapons, for which the Convention provides.

Nine years ago, the Syrian Arab Republic became the 190th State Party to the Chemical Weapons Convention. Time has shown, however, that the Syrian regime is not committed to this Convention; in fact, it has shown only contempt for this Convention and its norms. The Technical Secretariat assesses, and the United States agrees, that the declaration submitted by Syria nine years ago cannot be considered accurate and complete. We know from the UN's and this Organization's own independent and professional work that Syria repeatedly used chemical weapons against its own citizens, even after its accession to the Convention, including using sarin on three occasions in 2017 and using chlorine barrel bombs on five occasions between 2014 and 2018. It is essential that the OPCW continue to investigate further such incidents. Based on the United States' conservative assessment, the Assad regime has used chemical weapons at least fifty times since joining the Convention. The victims of those attacks, and their families, deserve nothing less than full accountability for those responsible. Yet, Russia continues to shield the Syrian regime from scrutiny not only in this forum but in the United

Nations Security Council and through its disinformation and propaganda ecosystem. The Syrian regime's continued lack of cooperation with the Organization is unacceptable, and States Parties rightly – and overwhelmingly – took action in April 2021 by suspending certain rights and privileges of the Syrian Arab Republic. As we approach ten years since Syria's accession to the Convention, we reiterate that Syria must comply with its obligations.

It comes as no surprise that as Russia continues to enable and defend the Assad regime's chemical weapons use. Russia has also used chemical weapons. Russia in 2018 used a Novichok nerve agent in an assassination attempt against Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia. States Parties took action at the OPCW in response to this flagrant violation – including making the first-ever change to the Annex on Chemicals. Russia, again, used another Novichok nerve agent in 2020 in an assassination attempt against Russian opposition leader Aleksey Navalny. The Russian government and its disinformation and propaganda ecosystem continue to conduct an extensive campaign to cast doubt on and deflect blame for its role in both the Skripal and Navalny attacks. In addition, Russia has not fully declared its chemical weapons stockpile.

Despite these challenges, States Parties have indicated their resolve to strengthen this Convention. The Conference of the States Parties resoundingly adopted with broad regional support a decision last November affirming that the aerosolized use of central nervous system-acting chemicals, or CNS-acting chemicals, is understood to be inconsistent with law enforcement purposes as a “purpose not prohibited” under the Convention. Aerosolized CNS-acting chemicals are extremely dangerous outside a controlled medical setting and cannot be safely used for law enforcement purposes.

As we look at the accomplishments of the recent past, I am pleased to share that the United States has completed the destruction of over 98 percent of its chemical weapons stockpile, and we remain on track to complete destruction in 2023. The United States will hold a side event during the CSP to demonstrate continued transparency on our ongoing destruction efforts.

The United States looks forward to the opening next year of the new Center for Chemistry and Technology, which will further strengthen the OPCW's ability to facilitate international cooperation and capacity-building in the years to come.

As we look toward the future, the OPCW must remain agile and continue to adapt to 21st century challenges. To this end, we must strengthen the capacity of the Secretariat and deepen our engagement with stakeholders, including academics, industry, and non-governmental organizations. It is not surprising that the States Parties with the most to hide have blocked participation in the CSP by NGOs with relevant expertise. The United States will co-sponsor a side event this week to provide an opportunity for all NGOs with relevant experience to engage with delegations on strengthening implementation of the CWC.

Finally, the United States remains committed to advancing the role of women in all areas of the OPCW's operations, decision-making, and capacity-building. Gender equity, along with broader geographic diversity, across the Organization will only help to ensure equitable and effective outcomes as we look to bolster international security over the next twenty-five years. I will

participate in a side-event this afternoon to highlight how improving diversity strengthens our ability to address common challenges.

I would like to conclude my remarks by again commending this Organization and all those who continue to work to uphold the international norm against the use of chemical weapons. Our work is vitally important to global security. The United States is confident in the ability of the Organization's leadership and professional staff members to carry out the significant mandates we have entrusted to them to aid in our mission. At the same time, we States Parties must provide the resources the Organization needs to perform the functions we have asked of it. Now is not the time to waver in our support.

I ask that this statement be designated an official document of this Conference session and posted on both Catalyst and the public website.

Thank you.