

**AUSTRIA**

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR ASTRID HARZ**

**PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF AUSTRIA TO THE OPCW  
AT THE TWENTY-SIXTH SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES**

Mr Chairperson,  
Mr Director-General,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Austria fully supports the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union by the deputy managing director for security and defence policy, Ambassador Joanneke Balfourt. I would nevertheless like to make a few additional remarks in our national capacity. Austria thanks Ambassador Bård Ivar Svendsen for his able leadership of the Twenty-Sixth Conference of the States Parties. Austria congratulates Ambassador Vusimuzi Madonsela for his nomination as Chairperson of the Twenty-Seventh Conference of the States Parties; we look forward to working with you. Austria also would like to thank the Director-General and the staff of the Technical Secretariat for their hard work and their dedication to the OPCW.

The Twenty-Seventh Conference once more meets under extraordinary circumstances. While we have seen a gradual improvement with regards to COVID-19, the world has unfortunately had to witness the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine. Austria condemns this illegal aggression and we express our full support for Ukraine. This turning point in history represents a direct attack on the rules based international order and thus has grave repercussions on multilateralism. In the OPCW we see a campaign of disinformation and unfounded accusations against Ukraine. Austria strongly rejects such an abuse of a multilateral platform that should be built on mutual trust and transparency.

Another extraordinary challenge that the OPCW is facing is the current economic situation and the consequences of the strong increase in inflation on the biennial budget of the organisation. We would like to commend the Technical Secretariat for their efforts to balance out the necessary increases and Austria therefore fully supports the draft revised programme and budget of the OPCW for 2023 (C-27/DEC/CRP.4). The overwhelming support of the draft budget in the Executive Council was a clear sign of support and we call on all States Parties to support the Draft Programme and Budget.

Unfortunately, Austria has to note once more that no progress was achieved with regards to the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic. Almost ten years have passed since the Syrian Arab Republic became a State Party to the Chemical Weapons Convention, yet the Syrian declaration still cannot be considered accurate and complete. The ongoing failure to issue visas to key OPCW Personnel is outrageous and a clear sign that the Syrian authorities are not ready to resolve the identified gaps and inconsistencies. We can only repeat once more: the only way forward is for the Syrian Arab Republic to start fully cooperating in good faith with the OPCW. Austria continues to fully support the work of the Technical Secretariat, including the Declaration Assessment Team, the Fact-Finding Mission, and the Investigation and Identification Team.

Austria remains fully committed to the fight against impunity for the use of chemical weapons. Austria therefore once more calls on the Russian Federation to conduct an impartial and transparent investigation into the assassination attempt on the Russian citizen Alexei Navalny on Russian territory and to address the legitimate questions raised by 45 States Parties over a year ago under Article IX(2) of the Convention.

In closing, please let me repeat our unwavering support for the work of the OPCW and our full confidence in the Technical Secretariat. I would kindly ask you, Mr Chairperson, to consider this statement as an official document of the Twenty-Seventh Conference of the States Parties and to post it on the OPCW external server and public website.

I thank you.