

Statement by H.E. Kateřina Sequensová, Permanent Representative of the
Czech Republic to the OPCW

at the One Hundred – Second Session of the Executive Council

14 - 17 March 2023

Mr. Chairperson, Mr. Director-General, distinguished delegates,

The Czech Republic fully aligns itself with the statement of the European Union and would like to use this opportunity to underline a few points in its national capacity.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the Chairperson, H.E. Ambassador Ziad Al Atiyah of Saudi Arabia for all the preparatory efforts and for his excellent guidance that allow us to conduct this meeting of the Executive Council. Let me also express our deep appreciation for all the hard work of the Director General, Fernando Arias, and the Technical Secretariat. We have full confidence in you, Mr. Director General and in your staff and we very much value your professionalism and independence.

The Czech Republic welcomes the third report of the IIT. We commend the IIT for its tireless efforts in pursuing the establishment of the facts surrounding the chemical weapons attack in Douma and identifying its perpetrators. We highly value the complex report in which the IIT corroborated all the evidence and explored all the hypothetical scenarios suggested by some states. The conclusions of the report are daunting. We condemn in the strongest terms the use of chlorine as a chemical weapon by the Syrian government forces in Douma on 7 April 2018. Already nine chemical weapons attacks have been attributed to the Syrian forces by independent international investigations. Further, the report contains a whole new dimension as opposed to previously investigated cases, which is the presence and activities of the Russian armed forces in locations directly linked to the attack, notably at the airbase from which the helicopters loaded with chlorine took off, as well as on the site the morning after the attack. This now explains to all of us why the Russian Federation has been shielding the Syrian regime and perpetrators of this criminal attack through a massive disinformation campaign.

The failure to provide a complete declaration by the Syrian authorities represents a broader, equally concerning context to the cases of chemical weapons use in Syria. We express our concern with the continued non-cooperation of Syria with the Technical Secretariat and its Declaration Assessment Team by preventing the issuance of visas to all OPCW staff on time and in full, as presented by the Technical Secretariat on 8 March. Cooperation is one of the cornerstones of the Convention and therefore we reiterate our call on the Syrian Arab Republic to fully cooperate with the Technical Secretariat, in accordance with the Convention and UNSCR 2118(2013).

We remind Syria that by resolving all outstanding issues and adhering to the norms of the Convention, the decision adopted by the 25th Conference of States Parties on Syrian rights and privileges under the Convention might be reversed.

Let us now turn to the current situation in Ukraine. Repeated false accusations and claims by the Russian Federation that Ukraine and/or its Western allies are preparing to use chemical agents in Ukraine as provocations are clearly a part of complex slander campaign of the Russian Federation. The Czech Republic will not spend anybody's time in examining those wild stories in detail. I wish, however, to say clearly to Russia:

No amount of disinformation fog which you are trying to create is going to veil the atrocities and war crimes which you continue to commit in Ukraine every day, for over a year now. A recent round of spontaneous laughter following Russian Minister Lavrov's intervention at the Raisina Forum shows more than anything the credibility accorded to the Russian narrative not only in Europe, not only in the West, but in the wide world.

Mr. Chairman,

the Russian Federation has also failed to properly investigate the assassination attempt on Alexei Navalny. It is another case of involvement of the Russian Federation in the use of chemical weapons and we therefore call upon the Russian Federation to comply with its obligations under Convention.

The Czech Republic is a long-term supporter of the OPCW protection and assistance activities based on Article X of the Convention, notably in the framework of the Africa Programme. Our support is both financial and personal by providing voluntary contributions and conducting trainings respectively. We welcome that after two years of covid-enforced pause, it is now possible to return to in-person trainings, as we recognize that obtaining practical experience is indispensable in preparing first responders for chemical threats.

The Czech Republic underlines the key role that the Center for Chemistry and Technology will play in strengthening the OPCW's capabilities to address new and emerging chemical weapons threats, enhance investigative capabilities and support capacity building for OPCW Member States. We express our gratitude to the Technical Secretariat for its efforts to keep the project on track and commend the Director-General that it will be made operational within the original time frame. We look forward to its opening on 12 May.

The Czech Republic also looks forward to the Fifth Review Conference. It will enable us to assess the past activities and measures taken in order to implement the Convention, but also to discuss the way forward. Apart from the positive news that 99,4 % of the declared chemical weapons were destroyed, we have unfortunately witnessed also their use and the Review Conference should address those issues. We express our appreciation for the transparent work of the OEWG-RC Chair, Ambassador Lauri Kuusing, and confirm our readiness to continue our active engagement in the upcoming discussions of the Open Ended Working Group.

Last but not least, we recognize that the COVID-19 has changed our lives and our working environment, too. Moving to an on-line world was the only viable alternative to get the work done. Although it seems that we are back to normal we believe that it is important for the future to allow the Executive Council to continue with its work during emergency situations. The Czech Republic as one of the co-sponsors therefore supports the German initiative on Executive Council business continuity as it enables the OPCW to adapt to new situation in order to fulfill its tasks. We thank Germany for its tireless efforts to accommodate all views and concerns. We support the draft decision and hope that it will be adopted by consensus by this Executive Council.

We would like to ask that this statement be designed an official document of this Council session and posted on both the external server and public website.