

STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR THOMAS SCHIEB, PERMANENT
REPRESENTATIVE OF GERMANY TO THE OPCW, AT THE 103rd SESSION OF THE
EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

(The Hague, 11 – 14 July 2023)

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

Germany aligns itself with the statement delivered by the Permanent Representative of Spain on behalf of the EU.

We congratulate the Chairperson of the Executive Council, H.E. Ambassador Lucian Fatu, on his assignment and wish him all the best for chairing the Executive Council until May next year.

Germany applauds the able leadership of the Director-General, H.E. Ambassador Fernando Arias, and commends him and the Technical Secretariat for ensuring the effective implementation of the mandate of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. The Director-General and the Technical Secretariat can count on Germany's continued unwavering support.

Mr. Chair,

2023 is a critical year for the Convention and the OPCW.

The end of the destruction of the enormous stockpiles accumulated during the Cold is a huge success for global disarmament and a milestone for the OPCW. Contrasting with this very positive news, but not unexpectedly, the 5th Review Conference was not able to adopt a final document. Enormous efforts were made to find compromise language on the most controversial issues. Many delegations were prepared to go the extra mile to that end. However, very few States Parties were not prepared to agree on language which would have simply listed, in a factual way, the OPCW's verification activities in the last five years.

Still, it is a positive fact that a significant number of delegations undertook huge efforts to find common ground with the aim of achieving a consensual outcome. The will to strengthen the Convention was tangible and is unwaning. We managed to not only cover a broad range of important issues but also to reach agreement on many of them. As was expressed in a statement at the end of the RevCon by France on behalf of more than 70 State Parties: We should now continue working constructively on the actionable matters addressed in the draft outcome document.

Germany appreciates that the work has started. The extraordinary session of the Industry Cluster on 16 June kicked off the discussion on a possible reform of the industry verification regime which continued in a promising way at a regular session yesterday. We support further

work on the subjects of institutional governance, including geographical diversity as well as amendments to the tenure policy. Moreover, Germany would soon like to start informal discussions on how to increase dialogue and cooperation with civil society. As tabled at the RevCon, these discussions should also focus on the guidelines on accreditation of NGOs.

Mr. Chair,

Unfortunately, compliance challenges to the CWC continue to dominate our agenda.

Germany condemns in the strongest terms the Syrian regime's repeated use of chemical weapons. Once again, Germany calls on the Syrian regime to comply with its obligations under the CWC and relevant UN Security Council resolutions without further delay. It is absolutely unacceptable that the Syrian regime, with Russian backing, continues to evade clarifications of cases of chemical weapons use as well as of its initial declaration and suspected activities on its chemical weapons program. Germany commends the Technical Secretariat for its efforts to clarify the many unanswered questions in this respect; at the same time we deplore that the Syrian regime seems to use every pretext to obstruct the activities of the Secretariat's experts. There can be no normalization of its status in the OPCW unless it fully and verifiably complies with its CWC obligations as decided by the Conference of the States Parties.

Let me recall once again that UN and OPCW mechanisms have attributed responsibility of CW use to the Syrian regime in nine instances. The OPCW has played and continues to play an important role in this respect – by establishing the facts surrounding alleged chemical weapons use, collecting evidence and identifying those responsible.

However, let's not forget that attribution of responsibility is but one – if very important – step towards bringing the perpetrators to justice, be they state or non-state actors. We should be under no illusion: As long as perpetrators of chemical weapons use are not held accountable, potential perpetrators might think they will get away with it. This means that a successful fight against impunity, deterring potential chemical weapons users, will at the same time help fight the re-emergence of chemical weapons.

This is why, once again, Germany stresses the importance of cooperating with the OPCW's relevant attribution mechanisms, as well as with the relevant international courts and tribunals with the aim of bringing the perpetrators of chemical weapons use to justice.

Mr. Chair,

Germany condemns Russia's unjustifiable, unprovoked and illegal war of aggression against Ukraine which has been going on for almost 1 ½ years. Russia needs to immediately stop the war and completely and unconditionally withdraw from the entire territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders. We also call on Russia to immediately stop the barbaric and targeted attacks of civilian infrastructure.

Germany is very concerned by recent reports that Russia has used riot control agents as a method of warfare. Such use is prohibited under Article I of the Convention. We call on the delegation of Russia to comment on this and clarify its position.

We deplore that Russia continues to deny responsibility for the Novichok attacks on the Skripals and on Alexey Navalny, ignoring all calls for investigating the cases. Let me state

once again that the overwhelming evidence points to direct responsibility of the Russian state for these attacks, a clear violation of its CWC obligations.

Mr. Chair,

Fortunately, the year 2023 has also witnessed and will continue to witness some positive developments with regard to the implementation of the CWC.

In addition to the milestone of completing the destruction of the declared chemical weapons stockpiles, we witnessed recently the inauguration of the ChemTech Centre, in the presence of the King Willem Alexander of the Netherlands. Germany commends the Director General for his personal commitment and all those in the TS who were involved in this important and successful endeavour.

The CCT is a very important asset for a number of purposes: For retaining valuable expertise and know-how gained in the non-routine missions; for creating a hub for scientific exchange; for giving additional impulses to ICA by creating synergies in terms of training and capacity building. In short, the CCT and its state-of-the art facilities will ensure that the OPCW is fit for purpose.

In the context of ICA, let me briefly mention that Germany and Algeria signed a MoU establishing the Twinning of the Algerian and German Laboratory in the margins of the RevCon. This partnership is part of the OPCW Laboratory Twinning & Assistance Programme, an initiative with the aim of increasing the network of OPCW Designated Labs. In addition, Germany's voluntary contribution of 500,000 Euro to a project on "Enhancing the capacity of analytical laboratories from African States Parties" which has started in May will further support the laboratories on the African continent, with the aim of several of them reaching the designation status.

Let me conclude by confirming that Germany is strongly committed to upholding the norm against the use of chemical weapons and to fight against their re-emergence, and we are looking forward to working with the old and new members of the Executive Council in this endeavour.
