

STATEMENT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION
BY H.E. AMBASSADOR CONSUELO FEMENIA
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF SPAIN TO THE OPCW
AT THE 103rd SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL
(The Hague, 11 - 14 July 2023)

Agenda item 7 (c) – Elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme

I have the honour of speaking on behalf of the European Union.

Mr. Chairperson,

The Decision adopted by the 25th Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention suspending the voting rights and privileges of the Syrian Arab Republic is a strong message against impunity for the use of chemical weapons, and in defence of International Law, including International Humanitarian Law, as well as the integrity of the Convention. It was an appropriate response by the Conference to the clear violation by the Syrian Arab Republic of the Convention and its core principles.

In order for its voting rights and other privileges to be restored, Syria needs to resolve all pending issues, declare the full extent of its chemical weapons programme, and return to full compliance with the Convention. Ten years after its initial declaration, many important questions about the Syrian chemical weapons programme remain unanswered. However, there is no alternative to full and effective cooperation by Syria with the OPCW and all its established mechanisms.

Chemical weapons use has been independently attributed to the Syrian regime by the UN and the OPCW on nine occasions. The European Union condemns in the strongest possible terms the Syrian regime's repeated use of these horrific weapons. We remain steadfast in demanding that Syria immediately comply with its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention and relevant UN Security Council resolutions. It must fully declare and destroy its chemical weapons program and allow the unfettered access of OPCW staff to verify it has done so, in accordance with its obligations under UN Resolution

2118 and the CWC. Moreover, the EU calls to cease attacks directed against the Technical Secretariat, the Director General, their work, impartiality or professionalism. Such attacks shall not constitute extenuating circumstances for the crimes committed.

Mr. Chairperson,

The European Union commends the work of the Technical Secretariat (TS) on all aspects of the Syrian chemical weapons programme, and appreciates regular confidential briefings to States Parties. In this context, the EU welcomes the latest OPCW FFM report (S/2186/2023, dated 28 June 2023) on the reported incidents that occurred in Kharbit Massasneh, SAR, on 7 July 2017 and 4 August 2017. We take note of the conclusions of the report that the information obtained from Syria did not provide reasonable grounds to determine that toxic chemicals were used as a weapon in the reported incidents.

The OPCW's reporting is a crucial contribution to efforts to end impunity for the use of chemical weapons. The European Union looks forward to the continuation of the work of the IIT and the release of its next report, and is determined to ensure appropriate follow up of all its findings. The perpetrators of these reprehensible acts must and will be held accountable. The European Union has already imposed restrictive measures on 38 senior Syrian officials, scientists and businesspersons as well as four entities and companies for their role in the development and use of chemical weapons.

The European Union is ready to consider introducing further measures as appropriate and will continue to work towards ensuring full accountability for those responsible for these heinous crimes. The fight against impunity and the total ban on the use of chemical weapons remain our priorities, including through the International Partnership Against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons.

The Candidate Countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, Türkiye and Ukraine, the potential candidate country Georgia as well as the EFTA (European Free Trade Association) countries Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, members of the EEA (European Economic Area) align themselves with this statement. Andorra, Monaco and San Marino also associate themselves with this statement.

I would kindly ask you to consider this statement as an official document of this session and post it on the OPCW external server and public website.

Thank you.

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