



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 6: General debate

I have the honour of speaking on behalf of the European Union (EU).

The Candidate Countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Republic of Moldova, Montenegro 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.

The European Union would like to thank the Chairperson, H.E. Ambassador Ziad Al Atiyah of Saudi Arabia, for his wise and able stewardship of the Executive Council during the past year. We extend a warm welcome to the new Chairperson, H.E. Lucian Fatu of Romania, and assure him of our full support in steering the work of the Council.

We also commend the leadership of OPCW Director General, Ambassador Fernando Arias, and reiterate our full confidence in the OPCW Technical Secretariat (TS), its professionalism, impartiality and well-established technical expertise in implementing the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and tasks assigned by the States Parties.

Mr. Chairperson,

The European Union wishes to take this opportunity to express its appreciation to the Chair of the Fifth Review Conference, Ambassador Henk Cor van der Kwast, for his dedicated efforts throughout the Conference. The EU welcomes progress achieved on issues such as tenure

policy, diversity, gender equality and mainstreaming, NGO participation, industry verification, contribution to global anti-terrorism efforts and chemical weapons dumped at sea.

The EU regrets that despite the thorough preparatory work, and the intense negotiations during the Conference, it was not possible to achieve consensus on an outcome document. It is highly regrettable that a very small number of delegations, the Russian Federation amongst them, has not been willing to reach the same level of constructiveness and flexibility displayed by the vast majority of States Parties during the Conference.

In view of the European Union, and based on the compromises made, the provisional document provided by the Chairperson of the OEWG-RC could have been adopted as a package. We are committed to continuing the work in the Conference of States Parties and the Executive Council. To this end, while there is no agreed language coming out of the Review Conference, the EU is ready to build on the positive progress achieved in the OEWG-RC5 and the Review Conference, and work on all actionable items, such as tenure policy, diversity, gender equality and mainstreaming, NGO participation and industry verification in parallel with a view to strengthening the implementation of the Convention and adapting the Organisation accordingly. Nevertheless, such items will need to be further discussed with a view to achieving consensus-

The EU will spare no effort to continue to promote the full and effective implementation of the Convention, as well as its universalisation. As a concrete sign of our commitment, I am pleased to inform the Executive Council that on 26 June 2023 the EU Foreign Ministers adopted a new voluntary contribution of EUR 5.3 million in support of the OPCW activities in 2023-26. The new EU voluntary contribution will help finance key work strands, including capacity building.

Mr. Chairperson,

The use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere, at any time and under any circumstances is a violation of international law and can amount to the most serious of international crimes - war crimes and crimes against humanity. As members of the International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons, the EU and its Member States are committed to ensuring full accountability for those responsible for these heinous crimes.

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 the Syrian regime immediately comply with its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention and relevant UN Security Council resolutions. Syria 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.

Mr. Chairperson,

The European Union has condemned the assassination attempt on the Russian opposition politician Mr. Alexei Navalny in the strongest possible terms. His poisoning in Russia in August 2020 by a nerve agent of the "Novichok" group (a substance developed by Russia), has been confirmed, beyond doubt, by specialised laboratories in Germany, France and Sweden, as well as by the OPCW. We once again call on the Russian Federation to provide substantial answers to the questions posed by 45 States Parties in the framework of Art. IX, paragraph 2 of the Convention on 5 October 2021, and allow a thorough and transparent international investigation into the assassination attempt without further delay.

Mr. Chairperson,

The European Union reiterates its resolute condemnation in the strongest possible terms of Russia's unjustifiable, unprovoked and illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, which constitutes a flagrant violation of the UN Charter obligations and OSCE principles and commitments. Russia's brutal war, which has lasted 501 days, has brought immense suffering and destruction to Ukraine and its people. We resolutely support Ukraine, the victim of Russia's unprovoked aggression, in its inherent right to self-defence in accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter. We welcome the Secretariat's work in providing equipment and training to Ukraine in order to assist them with their readiness and preparedness to respond to a potential chemical weapons attack.

Russia's reckless military attacks on and around industrial chemical facilities constitute a direct threat to the civilian population and to the environment. We urgently call upon Russia to stop the shelling of civilian infrastructure. We recall that any toxic chemical used to cause death, temporary incapacitation, or permanent harm to humans or animals would constitute the use of a chemical weapons.

We are particularly concerned by recent reports regarding the use of riot control agents by Russia as a method of warfare. Such use is prohibited under Article I of the Convention. We call on Russia to strictly comply with its obligations under the Convention.

We repeat our call on Russia and its political leadership to stop its war of aggression and to immediately, completely and unconditionally withdraw all its troops, proxies and military equipment from the entire territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders. Russia bears the full responsibility for this act of aggression and all the destruction and loss of life it causes. Russia, its leadership, those responsible and their accomplices will be held accountable for their actions.

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

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