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CZECH REPUBLIC

**STATEMENT BY THE DELEGATION OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC TO THE OPCW
AT THE FIFTH SPECIAL SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES
PARTIES TO REVIEW THE OPERATION OF THE CHEMICAL WEAPONS
CONVENTION**

Mr Chairperson,
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 congratulate H.E. Ambassador Henk Cor van der Kwast for his election as the Chairperson of the Fifth Review Conference and express our full support. We also highly appreciate the inclusive and transparent approach of H.E. Ambassador Lauri Kuusing throughout the chairing of the Open-Ended Working Group.

At the Fifth Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties to Review the Operation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (Fifth Review Conference), we are mandated to assess the developments of the past to serve us as lessons learnt for the future activities. The stockpile destruction process has continued and is nearing its successful completion. This will be a positive milestone. At the same time, chemical weapons have unfortunately been used in several States Parties. Every case of use is the most serious breach of the Convention, but the case of Syria stands out. Dozens of allegations of use have been recorded in the course of the armed conflict. Dozens of civilian victims have been reported. In response, the OPCW acted with admirable resolve, creating a mechanism capable of identifying the perpetrators. The three reports of the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) published so far, together with the Fact-Finding Mission reports, represent one of the biggest achievements of this Organisation since its inception. We now know that OPCW is capable of carrying out independent and technically solid investigations in concrete, real life situations, to serve the policy-making organs in their critical assessment of compliance with the Convention.

We would be remiss at this Fifth Review Conference if we did not acknowledge this achievement which serves not only to uphold the Chemical Weapons Convention but has vital implications as well for the accountability for international crimes.

We also hope that the OPCW will preserve and further expand this unique investigative expertise through the newly inaugurated ChemTech Centre.



The Czech Republic calls on Russia to immediately cease its disinformation campaign consisting of unfounded allegations against Ukraine and others regarding planned provocations involving chemical weapons. These accusations will not divert international attention from the crimes under international law committed by the Russian troops during the aggression against Ukraine.

When it comes specifically to chemical weapons use, Russia should instead make full disclosure about the poisoning of Sergei and Julia Skripal in 2018. With regard to the assassination attempt against the Russian opposition politician, Alexei Navalny, in 2020, Russia has yet to substantively answer the questions posed by 45 States Parties, including the Czech Republic, under Article IX of the Chemical Weapons Convention. Not least, the IIT report on Douma raises several questions regarding Russian involvement.

Industry verification will be another important topic for discussion at this Conference. Several challenges to the long-term sustainability of the current system have been identified. This Conference should therefore produce a clear mandate to the Executive Council to work on a comprehensive reform, based on a thorough consultation with the Technical Secretariat.

As for capacity building and international cooperation, the Czech Republic has always considered it a crucial part of the work of the OPCW. We continue to support the Africa Programme financially as well as in kind. Experts from the Czech Population Protection Institute, which conducts regular training activities in East Africa, have meanwhile expanded those trainings to Paraguayan firefighters. We look forward to continuing these trainings in the future.

We also wish that this Conference task the Secretariat to expand its work in the field of chemical security. More ready-to-use tools should be produced for States Parties, especially those that assist States Parties to further enhance their national standards in chemical security.

Lastly, the Czech Republic wishes to see the OPCW as a modern, well-functioning Organisation. To this end, it needs to be sufficiently competitive at the labour market to attract top talent. We recognise the need to enhance geographical diversity at the Secretariat and commend the progress that the Director-General has made in this regard, together with rapidly improving gender balance. Now, it is up to us, the States Parties, to do our share in the common endeavour through promoting the OPCW as an attractive career option. Amending the tenure policy to allow retention of critical staff for a limited period, as well as re-hiring former staff for a new tenure period, are just some of the measures the Director-General should be able to use in his governance of the Secretariat. We have to remember that with the inauguration of the ChemTech Centre, the new programme activities will require corresponding expert resources. The need for best quality personnel therefore becomes even more urgent than before.

We would like to ask that this statement be considered an official document of the Fifth Review Conference and posted on both the external server and public website.

Thank you.