

**STATEMENT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION
BY H.E. AMBASSADOR CONSUELO FEMENIA
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF SPAIN TO THE OPCW
AT THE 104th SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL
(The Hague, 10 - 13 October 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,

We commemorated last August the sad tenth anniversary of the Ghouta chemical attack perpetrated by the Syrian regime. We will soon mark the tenth anniversary of Syria's accession to the Convention, but almost ten years after, we cannot but deplore the fact that the Syrian regime still has not complied with its obligation under the Convention. The Syrian Arab Republic has repeatedly used chemical weapons over the past years, causing numerous victims. The comprehensive and thorough investigations carried out by the UN and OPCW substantiate this failure of the Syrian regime to comply with its international obligations under the Convention, and its willingness to breach them. We urge again the Syrian regime to comply with the Convention. It must fully declare and destroy its chemical weapons stockpiles and programme 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. In this context, the European Union welcomes the information shared by Director-General Arias in his opening remarks that the full Declaration Assistance Team (DAT) would soon deploy to Syria.

The European Union also calls on the Russian Federation to stop shielding the Syrian regime from accountability for its use of chemical weapons, including through campaigns of disinformation. Moreover, Russia and Syria must refrain from 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.

The Decision adopted by the 25th Conference of the States Parties 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 Syria 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 Syria's initial declaration, many important questions about its 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. There is no winning through systematic obstruction and discreditation.

Mr. Chairperson,

The European Union commends the work of the Technical Secretariat on all aspects of the Syrian chemical weapons programme, and appreciates regular confidential briefings to States Parties. The OPCW reporting is a crucial contribution to efforts to end impunity for the use of chemical weapons. In this context, we pay tribute to Ambassador Santiago Oñate for steering the work of the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) and welcome his successor, Ambassador Hernan Salinas back to The Hague, and assure him of our full support.

The EU looks forward to the release of next IIT report, and is determined to ensure appropriate follow up of all its findings. We have already imposed restrictive measures on 33 senior officials, military personnel, scientists and businesspersons as well as eight 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, 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 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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