

## **UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

### **STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR JOSEPH MANSO PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE OPCW AT THE ONE HUNDRED AND FOURTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr. Chairperson,  
Director General,  
Distinguished Ambassadors and Delegates,

Today, as we near the tenth anniversary of the Syrian Arab Republic becoming a State Party to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), it is important for us to reflect on the norm against the use of chemical weapons and what the CWC and the OPCW mean to each of our countries individually and collectively.

As States Parties to the CWC, we have worked together to destroy all chemical weapons that have been declared under the Convention. The importance of this accomplishment cannot be overstated. Our collective efforts have enhanced international security and demonstrated what can be accomplished when we work together.

Today, the world is a safer place because of the Convention; however, we are not done. Among States Parties, there are a small minority that have not fully declared and destroyed their chemical weapons, and some that have used chemical weapons in recent years. Moreover, there are still States that have not yet joined the Convention, and advances in science are creating both new opportunities as well as new risks. States Parties must remain vigilant and uphold their obligations in the CWC in the face of the continued threat of chemical weapons development, possession, and use.

Building an organization fit to meet these challenges sends a clear signal to all those considering the use of chemical weapons that they will be held to account. To this end, the United States remains committed to providing the resources the Organization needs and will continue to support the OPCW through our active engagement and significant financial support.

It is vital that we not only approve a budget that allows the OPCW to continue its important work, but that we pay our assessments to ensure seamless operations. The United States pledges to work closely with States Parties to finalize a budget that meets the essential needs of the Organization while maintaining fiscal responsibility. During the facilitation process, the United States was pleased with the OPCW's transparency and comprehensive responses to feedback, and we hope States Parties will support the budget through consensus.

Mr. Chairperson, the overwhelming majority of States Parties are committed to the global elimination of chemical weapons and the obligation against their use. As States Parties to the CWC, it is necessary for our governments to speak out against the use of chemical weapons; however, statements alone are not sufficient. We must also use the tools that are available under the CWC and related decisions of its policy-making organs, to hold to account those who violate the Convention. Otherwise, then we risk weakening our ability to deter future chemical weapons use.

As the United States and many States Parties noted in their national statements at RevCon-5, the Russian Federation is in noncompliance with the CWC. Russia has used Novichok nerve agents at least twice in recent years in assassination attempts against the Skripals and Aleksey Navalny, which demonstrates that it retains an undeclared chemical weapons program. This pattern of behavior blatantly violates the CWC and is contrary to that of a responsible country in the international system. We call on the Russian Federation to tell States Parties the truth about its chemical weapons program and past uses and come into compliance with the Convention.

The United States also remains concerned about reports that Russian forces have used riot control agents against Ukrainian armed forces. Russia's state-controlled Channel 1 broadcast an interview with a Russian soldier, who described the Russian Army's use of tear gas grenades against Ukrainian armed forces. Under Article I of the CWC, each State Party undertakes not to use riot control agents as a method of warfare.

In response to Russia's disregard of international law, many States Parties have come together to support Ukraine to address the threats it faces. The Technical Secretariat and countless States Parties have responded to Ukraine's request for assistance and protection, as provided for under the Convention. The United States reaffirms its steadfast support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and expresses its solidarity with both the Ukrainian government and the people of Ukraine.

Mr. Chairperson, States Parties have consistently condemned the use of chemical weapons and taken steps to support the OPCW, including by funding its critical missions such as the investigations of chemical weapons use in Syria. We commend the ongoing work of the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission (FFM), the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT), and the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT). We continue to call on the Syrian regime to comply with its obligation to fully cooperate with the Technical Secretariat to provide the DAT with immediate and unfettered access to sites in Syria, to enable the Technical Secretariat to conduct its important work, and to completely, and verifiably, end its chemical weapons program.

We stand in remembrance of all the victims of chemical warfare in Syria. As U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken noted in a Press Statement on August 21, 2023 -- the tenth anniversary of the chemical weapons attack on the Damascus suburb of Ghouta that killed more than 1,400 people, many of them children -- "Syria refuses to take any responsibility for its vile campaign of chemical weapons use. We will continue to support the calls by the Syrian people and civil society for justice and accountability for atrocities committed in Syria, and to stand with Syrians in working for a future in which their human rights are respected."

We continue to call upon both Syria and Russia to work with the OPCW to return to compliance with the Convention and join the international community in fully supporting the OPCW's mission of eliminating the threat of chemical weapons. In the meantime, the United States will continue to pursue efforts under the Convention and in other fora to hold to account those that violate the convention and those that are responsible for use of chemical weapons.

Mr. Chairperson, the United States joins other States Parties in commending the work of the OPCW to safeguard the world from the horrors of chemical weapons and to support the development of its capabilities to address evolving chemical weapons threats. We must remain steadfast in support of the international norm against chemical weapons use. As President Biden relayed in a statement issued on the occasion of the Fifth Review Conference, "We must not stop until all children can grow up in a world without the scourge of chemical weapons."

I ask that this statement be designated an official document of this Council session and posted on both Catalyst and the public website.