

Statement by H.E. Mrs. Aiga Liepiņa
Permanent Representative of the Republic of Latvia to the Organisation for the
Prohibition of Chemical Weapons at the 28th Session of
the Conference of the States Parties
27 November – 1 December 2023

Mr. Chairperson,
Director General,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Latvia aligns itself with the statement of the European Union and would like to make the following remarks in our national capacity.

In the beginning let me express gratitude to the OPCW Director-General, Ambassador Fernando Arias for heading the Organisation and ensuring the implementation of the Convention. Latvia reiterates its full confidence in the Technical Secretariat's professionalism and impartiality.

Mr. Chairperson,

Today the concerns surrounding the prohibition of chemical weapons continue to be at the forefront of the international agenda. Numerous instances of non-compliance and flagrant violations of the Chemical Weapons Convention (the Convention) has become evident in recent years.

In particular, despite Syria's ten-year membership in the Convention, it is unfortunate to note that Syria remains in non-compliance with its obligations under this framework as Syria has not provided full information on the status of its chemical weapons stockpiles. Latvia reiterates its call on Syria to destroy its chemical weapons programme and authorise the unfettered deployment of the OPCW personnel on its territory to verify that it has done so. The prolonged non-compliance requires further collective measures by the Conference to address the situation. Therefore, Latvia supports the new decision on additional measures related to, inter alia, to prevent transfer of chemical precursors, dual-use chemicals, toxic chemicals, and related materials to Syria.

Mr. Chairperson,

Latvia strongly condemns Russia's unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine and demands Russia to withdraw all its forces and military equipment from the entire territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders. Russia's illegal military actions, war crimes committed against the Ukrainian population and continuous destruction of civilian infrastructure constitute a flagrant

breach of international law, particularly the United Nations Charter. Russia must be held accountable for all its actions.

The Russian Federation's brutal war against another member of the Eastern European Group, Russia's track record of using chemical weapons in the recent years, namely nerve agent of the "Novichok" group, numerous reports that Russia may be using riot control agents as a method of warfare in Ukraine now, clearly point out that Russia has not deserved a privilege to serve on the Executive Council (EC) in the upcoming term 2024-2026. Instead, Latvia strongly supports candidatures of Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine for the membership of the EC. All three countries are responsible members of the OPCW and fully comply with obligations under the Convention. They have the trust and support of the overwhelming majority of the Eastern European Group.

Mr. Chairperson,

Rapid developments in science and technology, including the artificial intelligence, have the potential to both create opportunities and pose security risks. Latvia believes that constant observation of developments in science and technology and continuous update of verification technology and methodology of the OPCW would strengthen our efforts against malicious use of chemical science and industry.

Latvia will support the continuation of the work on a number of actionable points discussed at the Fifth Review Conference of the CWC. The high turnover rate for Secretariat staff underlines the need for amending the OPCW Tenure Policy. It is crucial to develop means to support the preservation of key expertise necessary for the Convention's continued implementation. At the same time, we should continue to look for ways to improve geographical representation in line with the Convention. We commend the efforts and leadership by New Zealand and Panama as well as Chile in taking work forward in these parallel workstrands.

Latvia is convinced that gender mainstreaming should continue to be an integral part of the work of the OPCW and implementation of the Convention. We commend the Director-General and the Technical Secretariat for the work they have carried out so far and look forward to further progress towards gender equality in the OPCW.

Mr. Chairperson,

We ask this statement to be made an official document of the Twenty-Eight Session of the Conference of the States Parties and published on the external server and the public website of the OPCW.

Thank you.