



UK Delegation to the OPCW

***Statement to the 28th Session of the Conference of
the States Parties***

***by Her Excellency Joanna Roper, Permanent
Representative of the United Kingdom of Great
Britain and Northern Ireland***

Director-General, Mr Chair, Distinguished Delegates,

Let me start by thanking you Director-General and the Technical Secretariat for all your work preparing this Conference.

Many thanks also to our outgoing Chair, Ambassador Vusimusi Madonsela. I further congratulate Ambassador Suljuk Tarar on your appointment – you have our full support.

Mr Chair,

2023 has seen important successes for the Chemical Weapons Convention and the OPCW. Although a small number of States decided to block consensus on the outcome document, the Fifth Review Conference in May served as an important platform to underscore global commitment to uphold the norm against possession and use, and to progress issues including geographical representation and flexible human resourcing in the Technical Secretariat.

We also celebrated the inauguration of the Centre for Chemistry and Technology, which the UK is proud to support. We recently pledged a further 1.1 million Euros international cooperation and assistance funding for this financial year and supported the very successful CHEMEX Africa in Algiers.

And in July we marked the completion of the verified destruction of all declared chemical weapon stockpiles. Quite the milestone.

But, Mr Chair,

That milestone is unfortunately not the end of the story. 2023 has also been a year of serious challenge. A number of States Parties to this Convention still maintain chemical weapons programmes.

Russia used chemical weapons in the UK in 2018 and against Alexey Navalny in 2020.

In May this year, Russian state media reported Russian use of riot control agents against Ukrainian soldiers as part of Russia's illegal war of aggression. Use of riot control agents as a method of warfare is clearly prohibited by the CWC. Russia has so far failed to provide any plausible explanation.

Meanwhile, we remain gravely concerned by baseless Russian allegations of chemical provocations by Ukraine. Any use of chemical weapons by Russia in Ukraine would have severe consequences.

Further Mr Chair,

In August we marked ten years since the horrific sarin attack in Ghouta by the Assad Regime that killed over 1,400 people.

Since Syria's subsequent accession to the CWC in 2013, the world has witnessed at least nine further chemical weapon attacks by the Assad regime and chronic non-compliance with its CWC obligations.

In recent weeks, the OPCW Declarations Assessment Team (DAT) released further evidence of serious irregularities with Syria's declaration. Thousands of Syrian munitions and hundreds of tonnes of chemical agent are still missing.

Mr Chair,

This organisation can have no confidence in the Syrian regime's declaration and Syria's handling of toxic chemicals. This matters not only for the people in Syria, its neighbours and the region but for the safety and security of us all.

Over 50 States Parties have co-sponsored a Decision for the attention of this Conference. It recommends additional measures to control the transfer of toxic chemicals to the Syrian Regime and enhance support to criminal investigations, in accordance with international law. It will reduce the threat of further Syrian Regime chemical weapon attacks and of toxic chemical proliferation to non-state actors. I call on all States Parties to support the decision, 'Addressing the Threat from Chemical Weapons Use and the Threat of Future Use'.

Mr Chair,

The CWC remains one of the most successful disarmament conventions. But we have more work to do to realise the vision of a world free from chemical weapons.

Fast-moving technological developments offer extraordinary opportunities, but also bring new risks for proliferation, including threats from non-state actors. The OPCW can support us all to bolster capacity to prevent, protect and respond to chemical weapons threats.

The OPCW must have the tools it needs to deliver its vital mission. The OPCW's biennial budget put forward for our consideration this week is the minimum the organisation needs to deliver its core activity. We call on all to support it and in doing so, support the continued work of the OPCW in eradicating the world of chemical weapons.

Thank you, Mr Chair