



**STATEMENT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION**  
**BY H.E. AMBASSADOR OLIVIER BELLE**  
**PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF BELGIUM TO THE OPCW**  
**AT THE 105th SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**  
**(The Hague, 5 - 8 March 2024)**

**Agenda item 6: General debate**

I have the honour of speaking on behalf of the European Union (EU).

The Candidate Countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Republic of Moldova, Montenegro and Ukraine as well as the EFTA (European Free Trade Association) countries Iceland and Liechtenstein, members of the EEA (European Economic Area) align themselves with this statement. Andorra, Monaco and San Marino also associate themselves with this statement.

The European Union would like to thank the Chairperson, H.E. Lucian Fătu of Romania, for his wise and able stewardship of the Executive Council, and assure him of our full support in steering the work of the 105<sup>th</sup> session.

We also commend the leadership of OPCW Director General, Ambassador Fernando Arias, and reiterate our full confidence in the OPCW Technical Secretariat (TS), its professionalism, impartiality and well-established technical expertise in implementing the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and tasks assigned by the States Parties.

Mr. Chairperson,

The EU will spare no effort to continue to promote the full and effective implementation of the Convention. As a sign of our commitment, I am pleased to inform of the signing of a “Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Cooperation between the European Union and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons” on 20 February 2024.

The MoU is a concrete and visible expression of the EU’s continued support to the OPCW and its activities. It constitutes a formal framework for the strengthening of collaboration in the post-destruction phase of the implementation of the Convention.

It envisages regular high-level consultations on cooperation on present and future key areas in the implementation of the Convention while deepening the existing regular exchange of information and coordination on issues of mutual interest. The MoU is inspired by the partnership agreements the OPCW Technical Secretariat has previously concluded, notably with the African Union in 2006.

Mr. Chairperson,

The current global security landscape and new challenges cast a long shadow over our collective work to uphold and strengthen the global non-proliferation and disarmament architecture as well as the norm against the use of chemical weapons. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that the Technical Secretariat remains alert and able to fulfil its tasks. In this context we recall the decision C-28/DEC.12 adopted by the 2023 Conference of the States Parties, and its provisions regarding the sustaining and building of the Technical Secretariat's capabilities to investigate allegations of use of chemical weapons. The European Union also welcomes the confirmation by the Director-General that the Secretariat is monitoring all relevant situations, including in Gaza, and any allegations of use of chemical weapons that could arise, and stands ready to assist if requested, in accordance with the Convention.

Mr. Chairperson,

The European Union welcomes the release of the fourth report of the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) on 22 February 2024. The report concludes that there are reasonable grounds to believe that units of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) fired artillery munitions containing sulphur mustard at several locations in Marea, Syrian Arab Republic on 1 September 2015, affecting at least 11 persons.

The European Union strongly condemns the use of chemical weapons by the ISIL, as concluded by the report. The use of chemical weapons by anyone – be it a State or a non-State actor (such as ISIL) – anywhere, at any time and under any circumstances is a violation of international law and can amount to the most serious of international crimes - war crimes and crimes against humanity. This new report demonstrates once again the professionalism with which the IIT carries out its missions, regardless of the perpetrators of incidents identified.

Previously, chemical weapons use has been independently attributed to the Syrian regime by the UN and the OPCW on nine occasions. As a member of the International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons, the EU is committed to ensuring full accountability for those responsible for the use of these heinous weapons in Syria and beyond. We remain steadfast in demanding that the Syrian regime immediately comply with its obligations under the CWC and relevant UN Security Council resolutions. Syrian regime must fully declare and destroy its chemical weapons program and cooperate with the OPCW and all its mechanisms to verify it has done so.

Mr. Chairperson,

The European Union reiterates its resolute condemnation of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, which constitutes a manifest violation of international law including the UN Charter. Two years into Russia's full-scale war of aggression, the EU reaffirms its unwavering support for Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders and its inherent right of self-defence against the Russian aggression. Russia bears full responsibility for its war of aggression and all the destruction and loss of life it causes. It will be held accountable for its actions.

We are strongly concerned that Russia may be using Riot Control Agents as a method of warfare at the frontlines in Ukraine. Allegations and claims to this effect, including in Russian information sources, have multiplied. Previously, when asked about RCA incidents pursuant to Article IX, paragraph 2 of the Convention, Russia provided nonsensical answers. Furthermore, Russia has not reacted to international calls for a thorough and transparent investigation into the assassination attempt on Mr. Alexei Navalny in Russia in August 2020 by a nerve agent of the "Novichok" group, for which there can be no other plausible explanation than a Russian state involvement and responsibility. We reiterate calls on Russia to fully cooperate with the OPCW to ensure an impartial international investigation.

The European Union is deeply saddened and outraged by the death of Mr. Alexei Navalny in a strict-regime penal colony in Siberia, for which the ultimate responsibility lies with President Putin and the Russian authorities. Russia must allow an independent and transparent international investigation into circumstances of his sudden death. We will spare no efforts to hold Russia's political leadership and authorities to account, in close coordination with partners; and impose further costs for their actions, including through sanctions.

Mr. Chairperson,

The European Union welcomes the positive progress achieved on all actionable items following the Fifth Review Conference. The adoption of an Action Plan is an important step for improving geographical diversity within the Technical Secretariat and contributing to keeping it fit for purpose, while upholding merit as the primary principle. The Action Plan should be implemented in full respect of the Convention, and without micromanaging the Technical Secretariat. We also emphasize the need for further progress towards gender equality in the Organisation, including through the enhancement of gender mainstreaming in all areas of the Technical Secretariat's work.

The European Union reiterates the importance of engaging all relevant stakeholders, ranging from chemical industry to think tanks, civil society organisations and non-governmental organisations as well as the youth in the OPCW work. In this context, the EU welcomes the ongoing work steered by Ecuador and Germany on reflections for enhanced interaction with

Civil Society. We commend the active participation of States Parties to these reflections with a view to better capturing Civil Society knowledge and experience for mutual benefit as well as their meaningful and broadest possible participation in the Conference of States Parties.

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.

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