



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 7 (c) – Elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme

I have the honour of speaking on behalf of the European Union.

The Candidate Countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, North Macedonia, Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, Türkiye and Ukraine 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.

The European Union strongly condemns the use of chemical weapons by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in Marea, Syrian Arab Republic on 1 September 2015, as concluded by the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) in its report of 22 February 2024. This new report demonstrates once again the professionalism with which the IIT carries out its missions, regardless of the perpetrators of incidents identified.

In light of this new IIT report, the European Union is ready to consider introducing further restrictive measures as appropriate. 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 these heinous crimes in Syria and beyond.

The use of chemical weapons by anyone – be it a State or a non-State actor – 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.

Previously, chemical weapons use has been independently attributed to the Syrian regime on nine occasions causing numerous victims by the thorough and comprehensive investigations carried out by the UN and the OPCW. The European Union has imposed restrictive measures on high-level Syrian regime officials and scientists for their role in the development and use of chemical weapons. There too, the European Union is ready to consider introducing further measures as appropriate.

We are concerned by the ongoing criticism of the IIT by a few States Parties that call its creation “illegal” or “illegitimate”. We would like to remind these States Parties that majority voting is explicitly foreseen in the CWC if consensus is impossible to find. A State Party joining the CWC is subscribing to its rules, including as regards majority voting. Once taken, all States Parties are bound by a decision, there are no exceptions.

Mr. Chairperson,

The Decision adopted by the 25th Conference of the States Parties suspending the voting rights and other privileges of the Syrian Arab Republic was 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 violations by the Syrian regime of the Convention and its core principles. In order for its voting rights and privileges to be restored, the Syrian regime needs to resolve all pending issues, declare the full extent of its chemical weapons programme, and return to full compliance in accordance with its obligations under UNSC Resolution 2118 and the CWC.

The continued non-compliance of the Syrian regime causes serious damage to the objective and purpose of the Convention. A Conference Decision (C-28/DEC/CRP.12) on additional measures related to, inter alia, transfers of scheduled chemicals, their pre-cursors and equipment to Syria and elsewhere, at the CSP-28 was thus warranted. This decision also encourages increased cooperation to tackle the threat of chemical weapons use by non-state actors, including terrorist groups, a provision all the more relevant and essential in light of this fourth IIT report. Our common efforts to fully implement this decision will be crucial to prevent any future use of chemical weapons in Syria, be it by a State or a non-State actor.

The European Union takes note of the resumption of DAT consultations but regrets the complete lack of progress: ten years after Syria’s initial declaration, important questions about its chemical weapons programme remain unanswered. There is no alternative to full and effective cooperation by Syria with the OPCW and all its established mechanisms, including the Investigation and Identification Team. We reaffirm our strong support and appreciation to the professional, impartial and independent work carried out by the Technical Secretariat on all aspects of the Syrian chemical weapons programme.

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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