

STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR THOMAS SCHIEB, PERMANENT  
REPRESENTATIVE OF GERMANY TO THE OPCW, AT THE 105th SESSION OF THE  
EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

(The Hague, 5 – 8 March 2024)

Mr. Chairperson, Director-General, distinguished Ambassadors and delegates,  
Germany aligns itself with the statement delivered by the Permanent  
Representative of Belgium on behalf of the EU.

We wish the Chairperson of the Executive Council, H.E. Ambassador Lucian  
Fatu, all the best for chairing the Council's session in March.

Mr. Chairperson,

Germany would like to thank the Technical Secretariat for its comprehensive  
briefing on the Syria file on February 29<sup>th</sup>.

While there seem to be some positive developments as regards the clarification  
of open questions pertaining to the Syrian regime's initial declaration, new  
issues of concern have come up, as reported by the DG/TS, which raise doubts  
about the full termination of Syria's chemical weapons programme. Again, we  
urge Syria to fully comply with its obligations under the CWC and relevant UN  
Security Council resolutions.

Germany 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 the recently issued, fourth report of the Investigation and  
Identification Team (IIT) concludes.

The identification of the perpetrators of chemical weapons attacks in Syria by  
the IIT is essential for holding them accountable for their monstrous crimes.

Germany commends the IIT for its professional work and for producing yet  
another important, very thoroughly researched report.

Let me remind those few States Parties that keep questioning the legality of  
the IIT: The IIT was established by a qualified majority vote of the Conference  
of the States Parties in accordance with article VIII para 18 of the Convention.

The provisions of the CWC explicitly foresee majority voting in case consensus is not possible. Such decisions are binding for all States Parties.

In view of the IIT's important work and, more generally, the need of the Technical Secretariat to remain fit for purpose, Germany welcomes the decision C-28/DEC.12 adopted by last year's CSP, and its provisions with regard to sustaining and building the Technical Secretariat's capabilities to investigate allegations of use of chemical weapons.

Mr. Chairperson,

Germany is shocked and deeply saddened by the death of Alexei Navalny.

3 ½ years ago, in August 2020, Alexei Navalny survived an assassination attempt with a nerve agent of the "Novichok" group in Russia, for which there can be no other plausible explanation than the Russian Federation's involvement and responsibility.

We might never know what caused Alexei Navalny's sudden death in a penal colony in Siberia. It is also not clear why it took the Russian authorities a whole week to transfer the body of Alex Navalny to his mother.

What we do know is that, ultimately, President Putin and the Russian authorities are responsible for Mr. Navalny's sudden death.

We do not have any illusions. We suspect that Moscow will refuse all international calls for an independent and transparent international investigation into the circumstances of Mr. Navalny's death as it refused to properly investigate the assassination attempt in 2020.

Mr. Chairperson,

Germany is concerned that Russia apparently continues to use Riot Control Agents as a method of warfare in Ukraine, thus violating the Convention. The number of allegations and reports, including in Russian open sources, has increased. We already raised the issue in the OPCW last October, when Germany, on behalf of a number of States Parties, asked for explanations pursuant to Article IX, paragraph 2 of the Convention. However, Russia's response has been absolutely unconvincing.

Consequently, last week, a number of States Parties requested the Executive Council, pursuant to Art. IX, paragraph 3 of the Convention to assist in clarifying the situation. We call on the Executive Council to remain seized of the matter until convincing clarification has been provided.

Mr. Chairperson,

The end of the destruction of all declared chemical weapons stockpiles last year was a significant milestone for the OPCW. However, we should be aware that the challenges the OPCW has to deal with remain enormous. The danger of a re-emergence of chemical weapons, including their use by non-state actors, is one striking example. In response, maintaining the OPCW's relevant expertise and capabilities, improving national implementation and universalisation of the Convention as well as international cooperation will remain of critical importance.

New and emerging technologies pose particular challenges to arms control and disarmament. A deeper understanding of the relevant, fast-evolving technologies and their impact on the CWC now and in the future is urgent. Germany intends to host a conference in June on the potential dangers, challenges and opportunities that artificial intelligence poses for arms control in the area of weapons of mass destruction. We highly commend the efforts by the Director General to encourage deeper discussion on the impact of these new technologies on the implementation of the CWC.

In order to successfully deal with these challenges, the OPCW should benefit, as much as possible, from the cooperation with external stakeholders, particularly with civil society, including the scientific community, NGOs with particular expertise and the chemical industry. Ecuador and Germany are co-chairing informal consultations with the objective of making the ongoing interaction with civil society even more meaningful and productive. We call on the members of this Council to continue constructively supporting this process.

Mr. Chairperson,

Concluding, I would like to commend the Director-General, H.E. Ambassador Fernando Arias, and the Technical Secretariat for ensuring the effective implementation of the mandate of the OPCW. The Director-General and the Technical Secretariat can continue counting on Germany's unwavering support.

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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