

## **UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

### **STATEMENT BY MS. LAURA GROSS**

#### **UNITED STATES OF AMERICA REPRESENTATIVE TO THE OPCW AT THE ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr. Chairperson,  
Director General,  
Distinguished Ambassadors and Delegates,

It is a pleasure to speak to you today at the OPCW as a representative of the United States.

Today, the OPCW begins its 2024 calendar of meetings with great potential. Much was achieved last year that provides the Technical Secretariat and States Parties an outstanding foundation to deter and counter the threats posed by chemical weapons and to promote the norm against their use. Just reading the list is impressive. Together, we opened the ChemTech Center, substantially increased the Organization's budget, and adopted several decisions that will improve geographic representation, provide tenure flexibility, and enhance States Parties' capacities to counter chemical weapons threats. For our part, the United States completed destruction of our chemical weapons (CW) stockpile and announced millions of dollars of support for capacity building through the OPCW.

This year, we will build on these successes and continue to support the OPCW and its important mission. As we do so we must acknowledge and address continuing violations of the Chemical Weapons Convention and the threat they pose to all States Parties. For this Nobel Prize winning institution to remain strong, we must act. We need accountability for past use, measures to stop current use, and deterrence against future threats.

Mr. Chairperson,

With regard to accountability for chemical weapons use, we call to mind the recent, tragic death of Aleksey Navalny in a Russian prison. The Russian Federation's previous uses of Novichok nerve agents against Mr. Navalny and the Skripals are events that States Parties cannot afford to forget. We condemn Russia's uses of Novichok nerve agents and urge the Russian Federation to finally provide a substantive response to the Article IX questions posed regarding the 2020 poisoning of Mr. Navalny.

With respect to Syria, the United States assesses that the Assad regime has used CW more than fifty times against the Syrian people since acceding to the Convention. We remain seriously concerned about the regime's continuing CW capability, noting in particular recent Declaration Assessment Team reports, as well as the Director General's September 27, 2023, report entitled, "Accession of the Syrian Arab Republic to the Chemical Weapons Convention: Ten Years On". We call on Syria to comply with its obligations under the Convention without further delay.

The United States notes that the OPCW's technical capabilities are crucial to achieving accountability for CW use. In that regard, the United States commends the thorough and comprehensive report issued on February 22 by the OPCW's Investigation and Identification Team regarding the 2015 ISIL use of sulfur mustard during attacks in Marea. This report further illustrates the need for the OPCW to retain its unique investigative expertise, which helps us all uphold the norm against CW use. The United States also welcomes the adoption by States Parties at the November 2023 CSP of the decision entitled, "Addressing the Threat from Chemical Weapons Use and the Threat of Future Use," which will help the Organization to sustain and build critical investigative capacities in the future. The United States urges the Organization and States Parties to work together to ensure prompt implementation of the decision.

With regard to action to stop current use, Russian media sources have released videos describing and depicting the Russian military's use of riot

control agents as a method of warfare in Ukraine. Also, in mid-January, the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine noted that the frequency of Russia's chemical use against Ukrainian forces is increasing, as is the variety of chemical munitions that Russian forces are using on the battlefield. Ukraine has reported the use of tear gas such as CS as well as use of chloropicrin—a choking agent included on schedule 3.

We call on the Russian Federation to immediately stop all use of riot control agents as a method of warfare against Ukrainian forces, as well as any use of chemicals in violation of the CWC. The United States is proud to support Ukraine to obtain assistance in investigating and responding to chemical weapons use.

And, lastly, Mr. Chairperson, it is important to raise awareness to deter and dissuade further development and future use of chemical weapons. I would like in particular to highlight our longstanding concerns and assessments that Iran remains in non-compliance with the CWC. The United States assesses that Iran maintains a CW program and did not declare all of its chemical weapons related activities and facilities as required when it ratified the CWC. The United States also assesses that since acceding to the CWC, Iran has developed and filled weapons with pharmaceutical-based agents in violation of its obligations to the Convention.

On September 28, 2023, a hacker organization published documents online, which they identified as confidential reports from the Iranian regime. The documents explain in detail how to weaponize medetomidine, a pharmaceutical-based agent. These documents confirm our prior concerns about Iranian development of such agents. In addition, the United States was recently made aware that Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps publicly threatened to poison U.S. government officials on its official Telegram channel.

These concerns are amplified given that Iran continues to be the leading state sponsor of terrorism, facilitating a wide range of terrorist activities through aligned militia groups. We call on the Iranian government to end its

CW program, cease its threats regarding the use of poisons, and ensure that its proxies and other militant partners do not use chemical weapons.

Mr. Chairperson, the work of the Organization to address the threat from chemical weapons has been outstanding. With the steps taken by the Director General and States Parties, the Organization will continue to excel.

The United States will support the Organization, and we will work to uphold the norm against CW use. There can be no impunity for the use of CW.

I ask that this statement be designated an official document of this Council session and posted on both Catalyst and the public website.