STATEMENT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION
BY H.E. AMBASSADOR DÁNIEL MIHÁLY HOROGSZEGI SZILÁGYI
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF HUNGARY TO THE OPCW
AT THE 106th SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL
(The Hague, 9 – 12 July 2024)

Agenda item 6 (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 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 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.

Chemical weapons use has been independently attributed to the Syrian regime on nine occasions 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 as well as entities for their role in the development and use of chemical weapons. We are ready to consider introducing further 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. In this context, we take note of the establishment here in The Hague on 17 June 2024 of a cross-regional working group to advance proposals for international criminal accountability for documented chemical weapons use.

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 object and purpose of the Convention. The Conference therefore decided at its 28th Session on additional measures related to, inter alia, transfers of scheduled chemicals, their pre-cursors and equipment to Syria and elsewhere (cf. C-28/DEC/CRP.12). 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. It also encourages increased cooperation to tackle the threat of chemical weapons use by non-state actors, including terrorist groups.

Mr. Chairperson,

The European Union takes note of the Director-General’s report (EC-106/DG.7) regarding the workstrands on eliminating the Syrian Chemical Weapons Programme and regrets the complete lack of progress: more than ten years after Syria’s initial declaration, numerous and important questions 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 reject criticism of the IIT by a few States Parties that call its creation “illegal” or “illegitimate”. We would like to remind that majority voting is explicitly foreseen in the Convention if consensus is impossible to find. A State Party joining the CWC is subscribing to its rules, including as regards majority voting and budgetary consequences of these votes. Once taken, all States Parties are bound by a decision, there are no exceptions, no cherry-picking. The four reports issued so far demonstrate the professionalism and independence with which the IIT carries out its missions, regardless of which perpetrator has been identified.

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.

*   *   *