

Statement by H.E. Mrs. Solvita Āboltiņa
Permanent Representative of the Republic of Latvia to the
Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons
at the 106th Session of the Executive Council
9-12 July 2024

Mr. Chairperson,
Director General,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Latvia aligns itself with the statement of the European Union and would like to make the following remarks in its national capacity.

The Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) constitutes an important element of the global architecture of arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation. The full and effective implementation of the CWC contributes to international peace and security. Latvia supports initiatives to strengthen international norms prohibiting chemical weapons. Unfortunately, in recent years we have witnessed an alarming increase of cases of confirmed incidents of chemical weapons use. Latvia welcomes the Technical Secretariat's commitment to monitor all relevant situations and any allegations of use of chemical weapons that could arise. Impunity for the use of chemical weapons must not be tolerated. The use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere, at any time and under any circumstances is a violation of international law and can amount to the most serious crimes of international concern, namely war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Mr. Chairperson,

Latvia strongly condemns Russia's unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine which has entered its third year, and demands Russia to withdraw all its forces and military equipment from Ukraine's internationally recognised borders. Russia's illegal military actions, war crimes committed against the Ukrainian population and constant attacks against civilian infrastructure and terror against its

people constitute a gross violation of international law including the United Nations Charter. Russia must be held accountable for all of these unlawful actions.

It is worrying that more and more reports suggest that Russia is using riot control agents as warfare method against Ukraine thus violating the Chemical Weapons Convention. Latvia is also strongly concerned about the alleged use of choking agent chloropicrin by Russia. The Ukrainian law enforcement institutions are actively documenting and investigating each and every such case. Accordingly, we see that Russia is degrading the rules and norms of international law.

Latvia welcomes the adoption of the Ad hoc Agreement between Ukraine and the Secretariat on Privileges and Immunities enabling an OPCW Technical Assistance Visit. We expect the Secretariat to continue monitoring the situation in Ukraine closely and to be fully prepared to take an action should this be requested in line with the provisions of the Convention.

Latvia regrets that almost 4 years have passed and the Russian Federation has yet to respond to calls by the international community for a thorough and transparent investigation of poisoning by a military chemical nerve agent of the “Novichok” group its opposition politician the late Alexei Navalny. For the death of Alexei Navalny direct responsibility lies with Russia’s political leadership. Latvia supports the imposition of additional international sanctions on Russia to facilitate its further international isolation.

Mr. Chairperson,

The international community has seen evidence presented by the UN and the OPCW on use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime on nine cases. The continued non-compliance of the Syrian regime causes serious damage to the objective and purpose of the Convention. Latvia urges Syria to engage constructively with the Secretariat to resolve the pending issues, declare the full extent of its chemical weapons programme, and return to full compliance with the Convention.

Mr. Chairperson,

Rapid developments in science and technology, including Artificial Intelligence (AI), provide tremendous potential, but we must also acknowledge their ability to introduce new vulnerabilities that can be exploited by malicious actors (for instance, by abusing

AI technologies to develop new chemical weapons). International cooperation and proactive approach are essential to addressing both the risks and opportunities posed by AI in the area of weapons of mass destruction. Latvia welcomes various initiatives in this respect – including a meeting organised by the Technical Secretariat with external experts and the RAC 2024 conference organised by Germany.

Mr. Chairperson,

I would kindly ask you to consider this statement as an official document of the Council and post it on the OPCW external server and public website.

Thank you.