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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

**STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR ROBERT P. MIKULAK
UNITED STATES PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE AT THE
SEVENTEENTH SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES**

Mr Chairman, Mr Director-General, distinguished delegates,

I want to begin by pledging to all of you the support of the entire U.S. delegation to make this a productive session.

Mr Chairman,

I want to warmly welcome you. I have every confidence in your ability to guide us skilfully through our work this week. I also extend my delegation's deep appreciation to the outgoing Chairman, Ambassador Paul Arkwright of the United Kingdom, and thank him for his dedication and exemplary service to this Organisation over the past year.

I would also like to express my appreciation to our Director-General, Ambassador Ahmet Üzümcü, and, through him, to all of our colleagues in the Technical Secretariat. The many successes this Organisation has achieved over the past year are directly related to his leadership and to the dedication and hard work of the staff of the Technical Secretariat.

I would also like to welcome the heads of Divisions in the Technical Secretariat who are new since the Sixteenth Session of the Conference: Konstantin Gavrillov, Marcelo Kos, Alberto Dohas and Mark Albon.

The fundamental goal of this Organisation is to exclude completely the possibility of the use of chemical weapons. The total destruction of chemical weapons is a key objective in this regard. The United States has come a long way towards meeting its obligation to destroy its chemical weapons, and I am proud to report on these achievements.

To date, the United States has destroyed nearly 90% of its Category 1 chemical weapons. We have also destroyed all of our former chemical weapons production facilities. Since the States Parties met last December, the United States has completed chemical agent destruction activities in Tooele, Utah. Tooele was our largest stockpile site and originally contained 44% of the entire U.S. stockpile.

Overall, the United States has spent more than USD 25 billion on the destruction of its chemical weapons. In addition, we have contributed more than USD one billion in assistance



to Russia and other States Parties to help enable them to eliminate their chemical weapons stockpiles.

As all chemical weapons possessors have discovered, destruction of such weapons is a difficult task. Over the course of many years, the United States has addressed and resolved safety and environmental concerns raised by local authorities, as well as by people living near our chemical weapons storage and destruction facilities. Complex technical issues have been mitigated and the lessons learned have been passed on to our other chemical weapons destruction sites. We will continue to make every effort to ensure that our chemical weapons are destroyed in a manner consistent with the Convention: safely, without harm to workers, people living near the facility, or the environment; verifiably, under the eyes of OPCW inspectors; and as rapidly as practicable.

The United States welcomes the near-unanimous decision taken by the Conference last year regarding the chemical weapons destruction deadline. Under it, the remaining possessor States Parties will complete chemical weapons destruction, in accordance with the provisions of the Convention and subject to the continuing scrutiny of the Executive Council, the Conference and the Review Conference. The United States will faithfully implement the provisions of the Conference decision on the final extended deadline of 29 April 2012 (C-16/DEC.11, dated 1 December 2011). That Conference decision comprehensively addressed all aspects of this situation. What remains is the continued implementation of that decision until all chemical weapons have been destroyed. We continue to work hard towards complete destruction of all our chemical weapons, in accordance with our commitments.

We are making steady progress in building the chemical weapons destruction facilities that will destroy the last 10% of our stocks. Construction at Pueblo, Colorado is nearly complete at 97% and construction is progressing at Blue Grass, Kentucky, at 57% complete. As required by last year's decision, the United States will present a detailed description of our chemical weapons destruction status later in this Conference. I am pleased to announce that representatives of the Executive Council will be invited to visit these facilities during the week of 20 May 2013, to witness for themselves the progress that we are achieving. We will maintain our firm commitment to the complete and transparent elimination of our stockpile until the last chemical weapon is destroyed.

The United States has also been working closely with the Libyan delegation and National Authority to help Libya assess destruction technologies for the chemical weapons of unknown origin previously hidden by the Qadhafi regime. We welcome Libya's commitment to resume chemical weapons destruction as soon as the necessary technical arrangements can be made and other conditions will allow. As I have mentioned at several Executive Council meetings, the United States, like other State Parties, remains concerned about the origin of these chemical weapons stocks. We look forward to additional information that the Technical Secretariat can gather and provide to the Executive Council and to this Conference that addresses where the hidden chemical weapons, and the chemical agent they contain, were produced.

Let me now turn to a matter of grave concern to the United States involving a non-State Party to the Convention. On 23 July the Government of Syria publicly acknowledged that it possesses chemical weapons, and it underscored its willingness to use them in response to "external aggression." President Obama has made it clear that the use of chemical weapons in Syria would have enormous consequences. The UN Secretary-General and our

Director-General have emphasised that the use of chemical weapons would be “reprehensible.” Other world leaders have stressed the same point. We continue to call on the Syrian government to give up its chemical weapons arsenal and join the Chemical Weapons Convention, and we will continue to work with the international community toward that end. But while we wholeheartedly pursue that goal, prudence requires that the international community nevertheless make preparations. All States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention should consider the support and assistance that they could provide to victims or neighbouring nations if there is a chemical weapons release or use involving Syria.

The United States also believes the OPCW could play an important role, and we support the actions the Director-General has taken with respect to contingency planning and operational readiness. Under Article X of the Convention, any State Party in the region could request assistance through the OPCW if it considers that chemical weapons have been used against it or if it is threatened by actions or activities of any State that are prohibited for States Parties by Article I. Further, as detailed in Part XI of the Convention’s Verification Annex, the OPCW, if so requested, shall put its resources at the disposal of the Secretary-General of the United Nations in the case of alleged use of chemical weapons involving a State not Party to the Convention. In this regard, we welcome and strongly support the successful efforts of the Director-General to reach an understanding with the United Nations on a Supplementary Arrangement for implementation of the Relationship Agreement between the OPCW and the UN.

In joining the Chemical Weapons Convention, all States Parties express their determination, in the words of the preamble “for the sake of all mankind, to exclude completely the possibility of the use of chemical weapons, through the implementation of the provisions of this Convention.” The world is now faced with a situation where the possibility of the use of chemical weapons is very real. The United States believes all States Parties to the Convention must demonstrate through their statements and actions that same determination to exclude completely the use of chemical weapons in Syria.

Bringing all remaining non-Member States into the Convention, especially those that possess chemical weapons, clearly is essential to realise the Convention’s objectives. Although this will depend more on geopolitical developments than on continued demarches, we must persistently stress that there is no justification for any country to keep the option to have chemical weapons. We must actively seek to engage these States at all levels and be quick to seize any opportunities that may unexpectedly appear.

To exclude completely the threat of the use of chemical weapons, it is not enough to destroy existing weapons and for all nations to accede to the Convention; we must also prevent the re-emergence of chemical weapons, whether in the arsenals of States or in the hands of non-State actors. Articles VI, VII, X, and XI all play important roles in this regard in helping to reduce the chemical threat. Declarations and inspections under Article VI help ensure that chemical industry facilities are not misused for purposes prohibited by the Convention. Article VII helps to ensure that States can effectively implement the provisions on their own territory. In particular, it provides important tools to law enforcement authorities to combat potential terrorists who might misuse toxic chemicals for hostile purposes. States Parties’ activities under Article X, to help protect themselves against chemical weapons, also help prepare them to deal effectively with relevant toxic chemical incidents and thereby help to deter the misuse of toxic chemicals. Cooperative activities under Article XI are important to assist States Parties in meeting their Article VII obligations. The impact of these articles is

thus mutually supportive and reinforcing. One article does not exist in isolation from the others; they are positively and intricately intertwined.

The principal decision on the Conference's agenda is the approval of the draft OPCW Programme and Budget for 2013. The United States is pleased that the Council at its Seventieth Session was able to achieve agreement on a consensus recommendation that provides sufficient funding for a full programme of activities. We also appreciate the economies and efficiencies that the Technical Secretariat was able to identify to take into account the austere financial climate that many governments face.

In a few months, States Parties will be meeting again to review the operation of the Convention. We understand this review as a three-stage process. Delegations are now actively engaged in the first stage, which is to prepare a draft final document for the Review Conference. The United States strongly supports the efforts of the open-ended working group under the capable chairmanship of Ambassador Nassima Baghli of Algeria. In this preparatory phase, we must look both backward and forward in time. We must look backward to assess how effective the implementation of the Convention has been over the past five years. And we must look forward to ensure the Convention remains an effective and relevant international instrument for reducing the risk of chemical weapons. The second stage of the review process will be the Review Conference itself, at which States Parties will discuss and resolve differences to set the course for the years ahead. And the third phase will be the follow-up to ensure that the guidance and decisions of the Review Conference are fully and effectively implemented. In this three-stage process, we must think carefully about how best to ensure that the Convention regime is capable of handling new challenges in an evolving global security environment, particularly one in which non-State actors are a significant threat. Contrary to past experience, we should not be satisfied with an agreed document that no one will look at again until the next Review Conference in five years.

Before I conclude, I also want to express my personal appreciation—and that of the United States delegation—to Mr Krzysztof Patulej, the Director of the Office of Special Projects, who will be leaving the Technical Secretariat soon. His contributions to the OPCW go well beyond his most recent role; his distinguished service includes chairmanship of both the Executive Council and the Conference of the States Parties. We hope that he will continue in some way to be involved in the work of the OPCW.

In closing, I request that this statement be circulated as an official document of the Seventeenth Session of the Conference.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.

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