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STATEMENT BY

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to the

Twentieth Session of the Conference of the States Parties

Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons

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Mister Chairperson, Mr. Director-General, distinguished delegates,

On behalf of the U.S. Delegation, I congratulate you and extend a warm welcome and a pledge of our support for your efforts at this Conference. I would also like to express our appreciation to the outgoing Chairperson, Ambassador Vesla Mrdeen-Korac, to the Director-General, Ambassador Ahmet Üzümcü, and to all of the staff of the Technical Secretariat. Furthermore, I want to warmly welcome two new members to the Chemical Weapons Convention – Myanmar and Angola. The achievement of universal membership in the CWC remains a fundamental objective of the United States.

I will address several issues today; elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons program, U.S. destruction efforts, the Australian initiative on central nervous system acting chemicals, and the OPCW's precarious financial situation.

Let me begin by focusing on the Syrian chemical weapons crisis. Syria is not like any other State Party to the Convention. As the OPCW Executive Council and the UN Security Council have both recognized, the Syrian situation is “extraordinary.”

Regrettably, after two and a half years, the devastating extraordinary situation in Syria continues. In late 2014, the Fact-Finding Mission reported compelling confirmation that a toxic chemical, likely chlorine, was used as a weapon, systematically and repeatedly, against three opposition-held villages in northern Syria. In addition, witnesses invariably indicated helicopters were overhead during these attacks. The only party to the Syrian conflict with helicopter capabilities at the time of these and subsequent attacks was the Asad regime.

In February of this year, the Executive Council expressed its serious concerns, based on the findings of the 2014 Fact-Finding Mission reports. The Council also emphasized that those responsible for the use of chemical weapons must be held accountable. The UN Security

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Council reinforced this concern in Resolution 2209 and subsequently established a Joint Investigative Mechanism for Syria under Resolution 2235. The JIM, as it is called, is charged with identifying to the greatest extent feasible individuals, entities, groups, or governments who were perpetrators, organizers, sponsors or otherwise involved in use of chemical weapons in Syria. Attribution for the attacks must lead to accountability.

In October, the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission issued two further reports substantiating chemical weapons attacks in Syria. The Fact-Finding Mission concluded it was likely that one or more toxic chemicals were used as a weapon against opposition-controlled areas of Idlib province between March and May of this year. Once again, many of those interviewed reported hearing helicopters overhead at the time the chemical munitions were dropped on innocent civilians. The Fact-Finding Mission also investigated allegations of chemical weapons use in August in Marea, a town in Aleppo province close to the Turkish border. The team was able to confirm with utmost confidence that at least two people were exposed to sulfur mustard, and that the effects of sulfur mustard likely resulted in the death of a baby.

These reports are alarming. The position of the United States is simple and clear. The use of chemical weapons in Syria must stop immediately, and anyone responsible for their use must be held accountable. To that end, the United States fully supports the Joint Investigative Mechanism's efforts to determine who was involved in the use of chemical weapons for the incidents confirmed in the 2014 and 2015 reports of the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission. We look forward to receiving the JIM's first report which is due to the UN Security Council during the first-quarter of 2016.

The United States also welcomes the efforts of the Government of Iraq to investigate alleged chemical weapons attacks against the Kurds in northern Iraq during the summer of 2015. We appreciate the information that Iraq has provided and we encourage it to continue to be

transparent. We also commend the Technical Secretariat for its quick response to the Iraqi request for technical assistance. The United States looks forward to reviewing the report from Iraq on the outcome of its investigation.

Mr. Chairman,

Concerns about chemical weapons use in Syria are compounded by the Secretariat's recent report on gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies in Syria's declaration and related submissions. Despite 18 months of intense consultations with Syrian authorities, the Secretariat has been unable to verify that all of the chemicals, munitions, and facilities that comprised the Syrian chemical weapons program have been declared and eliminated as required by the Convention, the decisions of the Executive Council, and UN Security Council resolution 2118. Indeed, we are concerned that traditional chemical weapons may remain in the hands of the Syrian government or may become a proliferation risk.

In response to the Secretariat's report, at its October 2015 regular session, the Executive Council stressed the importance of fully verifying that the Syrian declaration and related submissions are accurate and complete. The Executive Council requested that efforts be expedited to resolve the gaps, inconsistencies, and discrepancies. The Council further requested that the Director-General provide a report to the Council before its Eighty-First Session that details all unresolved issues, in particular specifying those for which no further progress has been possible. My government will carefully review the Director-General's report and consider the next steps that may need to be taken.

The United States fully supports the excellent and on-going work of the Secretariat's Declaration Assessment Team, the Fact-Finding Mission, and the now operational OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism. The work in these areas must continue and the Syria file must remain open until the international community is confident that Syria is free of all

chemical weapons. The United States is contributing two million dollars to the new Syria trust fund to support the continued work of the Fact-Finding Mission and the Declaration Assessment Team. We will also contribute an additional two million dollars to support the work of the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism.

Mr. Chairman,

Let me now turn to other important issues before this Conference. I am pleased to report that the United States continues to make steady, measurable progress toward the complete elimination of our stockpile. We remain fully committed to completing chemical weapons destruction as safely and as quickly as practicable, and consistent with our planned completion date. To date the United States has destroyed 24,925 metric tons, nearly 90% of its declared Category 1 chemical weapons. More than 2.33 million munitions and containers have been destroyed, including 100% of its binary chemical weapons.

With respect to the other possessor States, we welcome the progress that Russia has made in completing destruction at all but one of its chemical weapons destruction facilities. The United States also appreciates the hospitality of Russia in hosting, at the closing ceremonies for these facilities, delegations from the U.S. and other states that had financially contributed to this effort. Regarding the Category 2 chemicals remaining in Libya, we encourage the Libyan government, as a matter of priority, to implement destruction plans for the chemicals of greatest concern, while ensuring that the remaining chemicals are safely stored pending destruction.

Mr. Chairman,

Led by Australia, twenty States Parties, including the United States, have co-sponsored a paper for this Conference that highlights the risks posed to the Convention by the use of

central nervous system (CNS)-acting chemicals, so-called incapacitating chemical agents, in law enforcement scenarios. These twenty States Parties recognize that CNS-acting chemicals cannot be used safely in law enforcement and have the potential for use as chemical weapons. The twenty States Parties believe that all States Parties need to address the issue of CNS-acting chemicals to help prevent the re-emergence of chemical weapons. We continue to encourage all delegations that have not done so to consider and subscribe to the notion that the development of these chemical agents for law enforcement purposes raises a serious concern that these chemicals could be used in a manner contrary to the CWC, and to put their views on the record. I can firmly state once again that the United States is not developing, producing, stockpiling, or using CNS-acting chemicals, nor are we using riot control agents as a method of warfare. Again, I commend Australia for spearheading this initiative.

Mr. Chairman,

The United States is pleased that the Council has recommended by consensus that the Conference approve the OPCW's draft Programme and Budget for 2016. The United States supports approval of the draft Programme and Budget.

My delegation is very concerned about the financial deficit problem that the OPCW is experiencing. We urge that prudent steps be taken now to prevent a possible crisis later on. One step would be for the Technical Secretariat to link actual spending to payments being received from member states and, in particular, to restrict expenditures not essential for operational activities and postpone major procurement actions until the financial situation improves. Furthermore, we would propose that the Conference authorize the Executive Council to take any financial decisions that may be urgently needed before the 2016 Conference of the States Parties. We hope that such decisions will not be needed.

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We emphatically urge those key contributors that are delinquent in their assessed contributions to pay their arrears in the near future. That will enable the OPCW's financial reserve—the Working Capital Fund—to be replenished in 2016, as required by the Financial Regulations. We also call on the Syrian Arab Republic to pay its bills under Articles IV and V of the Convention and note that its failure to do so will continue to put financial strain on the OPCW.

We all hope that the OPCW will be able to navigate through its financial difficulties. But at the same time, States Parties, and particularly the Executive Council, need to keep a close watch on the situation. If the arrears are not paid by certain states, including the 2016 assessment, then the OPCW could find itself in a financial crisis in the second half of 2016. Transparency about the overall financial situation, and particularly cash flow, will be crucially important and we therefore request the Director-General to provide detailed monthly updates to member states.

As we look forward to further collaboration and further work on the OPCW's vision for 2025, it is critically important that the policy-making organs and the Technical Secretariat work together to secure the OPCW's financial situation, so that we can ensure a sound and effective future for the OPCW.

Mr. Chairman,

I request that this statement be considered an official document of the Twentieth Session of the Conference of the States Parties and posted on the external server and the public website.