



British Embassy
The Hague

**STATEMENT BY H.E AMBASSADOR SIR GEOFFREY ADAMS, PERMANENT
REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN
IRELAND TO THE OPCW**

TWENTIETH SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF STATES PARTIES

Thank you Mr Chairman, Director General,

The United Kingdom supports the statement made on behalf of the European Union by Jacek Bylica, Principal Adviser and Special Envoy for Non-proliferation and Disarmament. I would like to add some additional remarks.

We welcome the constructive discussion at the Executive Council on 23 November about the OPCW's latest reports on its investigation into allegations of chemical weapons use in Syria. Any use of chemical weapons, by anyone, anywhere, must be condemned. All allegations of chemical weapons use must be investigated and the perpetrators held to account. The Fact-Finding Mission's reports, which concluded that sulphur mustard had been used in Mare'a in August 2015, and that chlorine had likely been used on multiple occasions in Idlib Province this year, are a source of grave concern. Perpetrators of these horrendous crimes must be brought to justice. It will be important that the UN's Joint Investigation Mechanism now gets all necessary assistance to take forward its investigation to identify those responsible for use of chemical weapons in Syria.

The Fact Finding Mission identified, in both its 2014 and 2015 reports, a pattern of frequent, continued use of chemical weapons in Syria over an extended period. Pointers such as the presence of helicopters at the time of attacks indicate that chemical weapons have been used by the Regime, a State Party to this Convention, on multiple occasions. It must stop.

We note with particular concern that non-state actors are alleged to have used chemical weapons in Mare'a in Syria, and also that there are allegations that non-state actors have used chemical weapons in Iraq. We welcome the Government of Iraq's decision to invite the OPCW to assist in its investigations into use of chemical weapons in Iraq, and welcome the Director General's personal support for this effort. We look forward to seeing the investigation's report in due course.

Unfortunately, despite the excellent progress made on global disarmament over the past two decades, persistent, ongoing use of chemical weapons remains a global challenge. We have more to do to eliminate the threat. The OPCW has been through a radical and transformative period of work to deal with the situation in Syria. It has had to adapt its ways of working. Its staff have been working in conflict zones, in often dangerous circumstances, in order to deliver the verification of a challenging destruction programme, assess the validity of Syria's declaration to the Convention, and investigate ongoing use of chemical weapons. It is essential that the Technical Secretariat can use this experience for the benefit of us all in the future. They need to learn the lessons, and to share new best practice within the organisation.

It is also important that the Secretariat retains the necessary expertise and capability to conduct the full range of activity that States Parties require of it, to support global implementation of the Convention. The current tenure policy has worrying implications for retaining this expertise. Is an organisation tasked with dealing with technical challenges, such as verifying the disarmament of the world's chemical weapons stocks, and delivering a robust inspection regime to ensure that chemical threats cannot re-emerge, really best served by a personnel policy where its specialist staff cannot serve more than seven years in the Organisation? In our view, it is imperative that the restrictive tenure policy be revisited. The Director General must have greater flexibility to retain experienced, talented, experts for the benefit of the Organisation and States Parties as a whole.

The OPCW can, of course, take steps in the interim to improve its knowledge management in line with best practice in other international organisations. Knowledge must be shared more widely, across teams and branches, and an open learning culture within the organisation should be promoted.

Turning to other matters, we are pleased to see zero growth achieved in the agreed 2016 Programme and Budget. We welcome the agreement that the OPCW must do more to improve the evaluation of its activities in order better to assess the impact of its work, including its success. We encourage the Technical Secretariat to improve the quality of its annual Programme Performance Report. This will require an improved, systemic, approach to evaluation and performance monitoring across the organisation, including the development of a programme management and evaluation policy.

The OPCW relies on all States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention to provide it, in a timely fashion, with the resources necessary to carry out its vital work. Indeed, it is an obligation of Parties to the Convention to do so. We continue to be concerned by the late or non-payment of assessed contributions, and the lack of reimbursement by some states for verification activities. This has a serious impact on the finances of the Organisation, as set out in the Secretariat's note of 4 November 2015 which highlighted the difficult cash situation the organisation is in, and the fact that the OPCW will be required to draw on the entirety of the Working Capital Fund for the first time. We again call upon those States Parties concerned, especially those with significant outstanding amounts, to pay their contributions in full to enable the OPCW to deliver its planned activities for this year and beyond. Any States parties, who are, for example, members of the Executive Council, should ensure that their debts to the OPCW are paid swiftly, and in full.

On a more positive note, we welcome Myanmar's ratification, and Angola's accession, to the Chemical Weapons Convention this year. This is a huge testament to the personal engagement of the Director General and many colleagues in the Technical Secretariat. We are close to achieving universality, and we look forward to welcoming South Sudan to the Convention in the near future. We urge those three remaining states that have not yet taken the positive decision to join the Convention, namely DPRK, Egypt and Israel, to do so without further delay.

A related challenge for all States Parties, and for this organisation going forward, will be to focus greater efforts on ensuring that national implementation of the Convention is also universal. We welcome the willingness of the OPCW and many states to provide assistance to promote implementation. We encourage States Parties who have not completed their national implementation processes to avail themselves of all the available assistance.

All States Parties need to remain alert to new challenges, including those posed by emerging technology, and the threat that terrorists may seek to acquire or develop chemical weapons. Encouraging awareness of these challenges is the first step to ensure vigilance, and to prevent chemistry being used for evil. The United Kingdom welcomes the establishment of a code of ethical guidelines for chemists, supported by the government of Germany, and led by Professor Alistair Hay. We also welcome the recent work done by the delegations of Australia and Switzerland on the issue of the aerosolisation of central nervous system acting chemicals. We were glad to co-author the paper submitted to this Conference. We believe that this work is an important and constructive contribution to the debate on use of toxic chemicals for law enforcement purposes.

I request that this statement be issued as an official document of this session of the Conference of States Parties and posted on the OPCW external server and public website.

Thank you, Mr Chairman