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FRANCE

**STATEMENT BY MR LAURENT PIC
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF FRANCE TO THE OPCW AT THE
TWENTIETH SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES**

Mr Chairperson,

I am delighted to see you take over as Chair of our work, and I extend my best wishes to your predecessor, Ms Vesela Mrđen Korać. I align myself with the statement made by Mr Jacek Bylica on behalf of the European Union.

Each year, the Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention gives us an opportunity to look back on the past year.

In 2015 we commemorated the hundredth anniversary of the first use of chemical weapons. In the spring in Ieper, we gathered to reaffirm our determination to ban for all time the terror, horror, and barbarism associated with chemical weapons.

Progress towards the universality of the Convention was also made in 2015 with the accessions of Myanmar and Angola. To completely eliminate the threat of chemical weapons in the world, the remaining States that have not yet acceded to the Convention must now join it.

Finally, in 2015 there will have been more progress in the destruction of the arsenals of possessor States and of abandoned chemical weapons.

Looking at these achievements, one could be led to believe in the end that 2015 was a good year for the cause that we are all supposed to be defending in this room, this moral obligation—which we have all voluntarily agreed to respect—to put an end once and for all to the abominable use of chemicals for hostile purposes.

We all know that the reality is entirely different. The harsh reality—the inconceivable reality—is that in 2015 chemical weapons were used repeatedly, and systematically, in the Syrian Arab Republic, a State Party to the Convention.

Just last week, the Executive Council held a special meeting to condemn such use. And it is a great credit to the Executive Council to have lived up to its responsibilities, on two occasions in 2015, by adopting the decisions that were necessary and by also involving the United Nations Security Council which, through resolution 2209 (2015), reacted to these despicable acts that are unfortunately recurring in the Syrian Arab Republic.



We face a grave situation. An unacceptable situation. It warrants the mobilisation of the entire Organisation, and the mobilisation of all States Parties. It warrants, despite the misleading agenda of our Conference, the Syrian Arab Republic remaining the top priority of the OPCW.

As long as the Syrian file remains open, as long as the international community lacks the assurance that the Syrian chemical threat is no more, we will tirelessly keep coming back to this issue. You can count on France to make sure this happens. And this is indeed what we intend to do in the coming months. Thanks to the commitment of the Director-General, which is most welcome, and to that of the Technical Secretariat, we must finish the work that has started.

The Fact-Finding Mission, which has kept us informed of what is happening in the Syrian Arab Republic, must accomplish its mission. The Mission has helped to shed light on the use of chlorine gas, systematically and repeatedly, against the Syrian people. Four of the Mission's six reports indicate the presence of helicopters at the time of the attacks, and we all know what that means: the pursuit of a ruthless crackdown using whatever means, including the most abominable, by a criminal regime against its own people.

Another report by the Mission recently found that mustard gas was used in the region of Marea. This first presumption of the use of chemical weapons by a non-State actor is cause for alarm, against a backdrop where terrorism poses a great threat to us all. I will come back to this.

Now the international community wants to go further. By adopting resolution 2235 (2015), the United Nations Security Council created a mechanism to permit—and this is our greatest wish—the attribution of responsibility, unambiguously, and that will allow for the perpetrators of these unspeakable crimes to be held accountable, in line with the commitment we made in the two decisions of the Executive Council. This mechanism is now operational, and it must carry out its task as quickly as possible and with the necessary vigour, in close collaboration with the OPCW. We look forward to its first report.

Faced with the repeated use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic, it would be extremely reckless for the international community to let any doubt persist as to the existence of any capacity, even residual, after the destruction operations that are nearing completion. That is why the Syrian initial declaration is so important. The team that you, Mr Director-General, have set up is therefore carrying out a most important mission. We expect that it will shed all the light on the accuracy and completeness of that declaration, that it will not tolerate any grey areas, and that it keep a close watch on the inaccuracies, inconsistencies, and contradictions, as well as failures to cooperate. A continued threat of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic is exactly what we cannot envisage. The assessment team's presentation to the Eighty-First Session of the Executive Council of the results of two years of its tireless work will mark an important moment.

With regard to the threat to international peace and security posed by the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic, the full cooperation of all parties concerned, beginning with the Syrian authorities themselves, is crucial. It is also up to these same authorities to respect their financial obligations towards this Organisation, instead of refusing, under some false pretexts, the solution proposed by the European Union, which would nonetheless allow them to live up to their obligations. Once again, it is up to the Syrian Arab Republic to

establish trust. Its talk of the supposed politicisation of the Organisation's work changes nothing.

Throughout 2015, certain situations caused concern within our Organisation. This includes the allegations of use in Iraq. We welcome the Iraqi authorities' willingness to cooperate on and their decision to call upon the expertise of the Technical Secretariat. Likewise, in Libya, the cooperation of the Libyan authorities with the Organisation has allowed for the destruction, as quickly and as smoothly as possible, of the Schedule 2 precursors that are still present on that State Party's territory.

Terrorism, which recently struck my country, and each day throughout the world claims new innocent victims, requires mobilisation on the part of the international community. It is therefore entirely justified for our Organisation to examine the contribution that it can make towards the fight against this threat. The work of the Open-Ended Working Group on Terrorism and that of the sub-working group on non-State actors, led by the Ambassador of Chile, warrant our full support. They would benefit from identifying the best practices that States Parties have developed to prevent this threat, in particular within the framework of national implementation of the Convention.

The Chemical Weapons Convention carries the hope of a better world, one that is free from chemical weapons. It is an important element in the international security architecture. And yet we have no choice but to recognise that we live in a dangerous, and violent, world, where chemical weapons are used for hostile purposes. Our Organisation's work is therefore not complete. As we collectively think about its future, let us remember, in the light of the Syrian crisis, the advantages, the expertise, and the added value that it brings.

Moving from a mission of destruction of chemical weapons to a mission of preventing their emergence or re-emergence in no way detracts from—quite the contrary in fact—the absolute necessity to preserve the Technical Secretariat's capacities for verification and inspection alike.

The objective of maintaining the Organisation's capacities must be reflected in the budget. In this respect, the budget that we are preparing to adopt for 2016 strikes a good balance and will allow the Technical Secretariat to fulfil all of its missions. However, it is up to all States Parties to live up to their responsibilities by ensuring that the OPCW has the means to match the ambitions that we have for it. The payment arrears accumulated by certain States Parties threaten the financial equilibrium of the Organisation, to the detriment of us all. It is therefore incumbent upon all of those in arrears to remedy the situation as quickly as possible.

Mr Chairperson, Mr Director-General, distinguished delegates, I thank you for your attention and would request that this statement be considered as an official document of this session of the Conference.

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