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**TUNISIA**

**STATEMENT BY MR MOHAMED KARIM BEN BECHER  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF TUNISIA TO THE OPCW AT THE  
TWENTIETH SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES**

Mr Chairperson, Excellency Mr Eduardo Ibarrola-Nicolín,  
Mr Director-General,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Tunisian Government and my delegation, I should like to begin by extending to you, Mr Chairperson, my heartfelt congratulations for your election as Chairperson of the Twentieth Session of the Conference of the States Parties. I am fully convinced that you will skilfully preside over our work to give us every chance of success. I can assure you of my delegation's full cooperation to achieve this end.

I should also like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation to your predecessor, Ambassador Vesela Korać, who, during the Nineteenth Session of the Conference and throughout this past year, guided our work effectively and with distinction.

Finally, I congratulate the Director-General, His Excellency Ambassador Ahmet Üzümcü, for the commendable efforts he has continued to make with the Technical Secretariat to boost the efficiency and visibility of our common undertaking in order to take on the new challenges it faces in an ever-changing world.

My delegation, which of course fully supports the statements made by the African Group and the Non-Aligned Movement and China, wishes to speak on a number of issues that it considers to be relevant.

In the early days of its independence nearly 60 years ago, Tunisia based its foreign policy on the principles of the respect for international law, non-interference, international peace and security, and cooperation. These foreign policy choices allowed Tunisia to make significant progress towards economic development and public education in a peaceful environment.

Moreover, it was in order to enshrine these values that Tunisia joined the Chemical Weapons Convention at an early stage and was a founding member of the OPCW.

This steadfast commitment to these values was confirmed over the past five years of the democratic political transition that followed the 2011 revolution, during which, in spite of a turbulent and threatening international environment, Tunisian civil society and political



actors demonstrated wisdom and responsibility by pushing for dialogue and peace to confront the challenges and to complete a political transition, pioneered by Tunisia, towards the rule of law and democracy, but one that had differing results in the region which endured major upheaval and raised the spectre of the use of chemical weapons.

The OPCW's exemplary management of this file and the substantial results obtained therefrom in the Syrian Arab Republic in terms of disarmament and universality furthermore earned our Organisation the Nobel Peace Prize in 2013.

And it is by the happiest of coincidences that two years later, Tunisia, through the National Dialogue Quartet, will receive the 2015 Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo in just a few days for its decisive contribution to the building of a pluralistic democracy in Tunisia through peaceful means.

The Twentieth Conference of the States Parties comes at a time of significant progress for our Organisation, in terms of the universality of the Chemical Weapons Convention, given the recent accessions of Myanmar and Angola, whom we are pleased to welcome. With that in mind, my delegation welcomes this progress, which reflects the near-universal desire to eradicate chemical weapons once and for all. My delegation takes this opportunity to urgently call upon the States remaining outside of the Convention to join it without further delay.

The adapting the OPCW's future priorities and activities to the prevention of the re-emergence of chemical weapons, in particular among non-State actors, comes in response to a need for the Organisation to maintain its vigilance in the areas of disarmament and non-proliferation. We must take advantage of the expertise acquired in the areas of verification, inspection, and cooperation as the established deadlines for the completion of destruction of chemical weapons approach.

In this connection, my delegation reiterates the need for the OPCW to preserve the expertise acquired over the 18 years of its existence in order to prevent the re-emergence of this category of weapons of mass destruction and thereby contribute to the fight against terrorism and promote international security.

Tunisia, which steadfastly condemns any use of chemical weapons, whether by State or non-State actors, renews its unconditional support of the consensus-based decisions taken by the OPCW's policy-making organs, which was adopted within the framework of the elimination of the Syrian chemical arsenal.

In this context, my delegation supported the Executive Council's decision regarding the establishment of an OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism and condemns the use of toxic chemicals on Syrian territory, as documented by the Fact-Finding Mission in its recent reports.

My delegation considers that the progress made to date in the supervision of the elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme, which has dominated our Organisation's work since September 2013, has been marked by the mobilisation of the international community and the resilience of all actors and the Technical Secretariat in an effort to ban these weapons that are prohibited by international norms and standards.

Nevertheless, my delegation remains deeply concerned about the use or threat of use of chemical weapons for terrorist purposes against civilian populations or law enforcement personnel and armed forces.

For this reason I call on the international community to direct and coordinate its efforts towards fighting this new scourge in order to eliminate it and to protect the populations in the regions under threat.

In this connection, I would like to praise the work carried out by the Open-Ended Working Group on Terrorism led by Dr Joe Tony Aidoo, Ambassador of the Republic of Ghana, for its effective contribution to global efforts in the fight against terrorism, as well as the work undertaken by Mrs María Teresa Infante, Ambassador of Chile and Chair of the sub-working group on non-State actors.

Tunisia welcomes the fact that our Conference has adopted concrete measures to strengthen the OPCW Programme for Africa, initiated by the Director-General, and fully supports any activities that would help to further implement this programme.

It is within the framework of the Africa Programme that Tunisia hosted the third analytical chemistry course for French-speaking African States Parties at the National Institute for Physical and Chemical Research and Analysis (INRAP), which was held from 29 October to 6 November 2015 in Tunis.

Along the same lines, my delegation should like to take this opportunity to reiterate its call for an increase in the number of African staff, especially in senior positions, within the Technical Secretariat of the Organisation.

In closing, I should like to personally thank the Director-General and the Technical Secretariat for the support and assistance they have always provided to our permanent representation, and would like to take this opportunity to extend a warm welcome to Ambassador Hamid Ali Rao, who as the new Deputy Director-General is taking part in the Conference of the States Parties for the first time. I wish him every success in carrying out his mission.

Finally, I would ask that this statement be circulated as an official document of this Conference.

Thank you for your attention, Mr Chairperson, ladies and gentlemen.

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