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TURKEY

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR SADIK ARSLAN
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AT THE TWENTIETH SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES**

Mr Chairperson,
Mr Director-General,
Distinguished representatives,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me a distinct pleasure to address the Conference of the States Parties of the OPCW at its auspicious annual event.

Seizing this opportunity, allow me to congratulate you Mr Chairperson, Ambassador Eduardo Ibarrola-Nicolín of Mexico, on your election to the Chair of this Conference. I have no doubt that under your able leadership and Director-General Ambassador Üzümcü's excellent guidance, we, the States Parties, will yet again address critical issues for furthering our aim of reaching a world, universally free from chemical weapons.

I also would like to commend Her Excellency Ambassador Vesela Mrđen Korać of Croatia, as the outgoing Chairperson, for her contributions to the success of the Nineteenth Conference of the States Parties held last year as well as to the work of the OPCW since the previous Conference.

Since the adoption of the Executive Council decision on the elimination of Syrian chemical weapons in 2013, OPCW watched over unprecedented events in its history.

The process for the removal of chemical weapons outside Syria had been a daunting task and a great responsibility for the OPCW-UN Joint Mission to save more lives in Syria and reduce the threats to the peace and stability in the region to an extent.

On this occasion, I would like to thank, once again Mr Director-General and his dedicated team, for their efforts in achieving a significant stage with the shipment of last chemicals.

Despite these achievements, it is quite clear that the task of complete elimination of Syrian chemical weapons is far from being over.

The reports of the FFM clearly suggest that toxic chemicals are constantly and systematically being used as a weapon in Syria.



The Assad regime is still acting with impunity in Syria by continuous use of chlorine as a weapon against civilians.

Moreover, outstanding inconsistencies, discrepancies and gaps concerning the regime's declarations indicated by the DAT reports strengthen our concerns about the possibility of even graver deployment of chemical weapons against civilians in this country.

While we highly appreciate the fact that the Technical Secretariat's Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) puts significant efforts to clarify questions on the Syrian chemical weapons programme, we are faced with a situation where every visit of the Team to Damascus raises new questions on the accuracy and integrity of the Syrian declarations.

What we need to take into account is that, despite Syria's accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention more than two years ago, civilians are still being systematically killed or wounded by the use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime.

Recent reports are concrete evidences in this regard. The regime did not give any stop in 2015 to its continued use of chlorine gas as a chemical weapon, mostly through barrel bombs dropped by its helicopters. Unfortunately, the international community has chosen to remain silent while hundreds of civilians are dying as a result of these attacks.

In the face of continuous use of chemicals in Syria, Turkey believes the States Parties must act in a stronger voice. If we fail to do so, the pressure for getting the Syrian regime to comply with the provisions of the Convention and the relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions will quickly erode.

Vague and soft statements and lack of firm actions against the background of all the official reports and incidents together with rather soft handling of the systematic use of chemical weapons by Assad regime since 2013, will unfortunately harm the credibility of the Organisation.

The use of chemical weapons by anyone, whether a State or a non-State actor, does not only constitute a breach of basic norms of international law, but also is a serious crime against humanity whose perpetrators must be held accountable.

Turkey strongly condemns the use of chemical weapons, as well as the toxic chemicals as a weapon in Syria, by anyone, be it a state party or a non-state actor.

The discrepancies regarding chemical weapons declarations and unfulfilled destruction of the chemical weapons of the Syrian regime underlines the risk and possibility of non-State actors and terrorist groups operating in the area taking possession of toxic chemicals and chemical weapons.

In this vein, I would like to express our support to the Technical Secretariat in conducting investigations into allegations of the use of chemical weapons in Iraq as well.

Pursuant to United Nations Security Council resolutions 2209 (2015) and 2235 (2015), we believe that the international community should refrain from attempts at creating legal acquis of the Syria chemical weapons file of the OPCW, which would dilute the prime responsibility of the Assad regime.

With this in mind, we, as the States Parties of this very Organisation, must be on the right side of history and fulfill our responsibilities.

In this respect, we need to face the harsh reality that the Chemical Weapons Convention is constantly being undermined by the use of chemicals in Syria by the Assad regime's forces. Inaction in view of these flagrant violations of the Executive Council decisions as well as United Nations Security Council resolution 2118 (2013), put the whole Chemical Weapons Convention's regime at risk.

Remaining paralysed to the credible evidence on persistent use of chemicals in Syria, as substantiated by the Fact-Finding Mission, will eventually lead to the questioning of the relevance of this Organisation. Clearly, we should act in unity and with one voice to avoid such an outcome.

The fact that yet another deadline has been missed so far this year with respect to the destruction of 12 chemical weapons production facilities in Syria is a stark reminder that there is no room for complacency when it comes to Syria's promises to fulfil its obligations.

If the international community does not react to the systematic violation of a State Party with a powerful voice, this will create the path of new systematic violations, possibly wider and will deteriorate the relevance of the OPCW as well.

The indiscriminate use of barrel, cluster and container bombs by the Assad regime continue undiminished. A recent aerial attack of the Assad regime with the help of its accomplices on some villages on the Turkish border triggered a new influx of thousands of refugees from Syria to the Turkish border, on top of the existing 2.3 million Syrian refugees that we already have.

It must be recalled that Syria is not an ordinary State Party to the Chemical Weapons Convention, it became a member of the OPCW, because of the crimes that the Assad regime committed against its own people by systematically using chemical weapons.

It is evident that the Syrian regime sees itself to be encouraged by the inaction of the international community. In this vein, we hope that the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) will serve as a mechanism to hold the perpetrators of these attacks responsible for their gross human rights violations.

We are confident that the OPCW's unique expertise will provide a substantial contribution to the United Nations' efforts to assure that the perpetrators of this war crime and crime against humanity do not go unpunished.

In this regard, Turkey firmly supports the continuation of the work of the OPCW's Fact-Finding Mission to put the regime's continuous violations on record and bring them to the attention of the international community.

The manners of the Syrian regime, is a clear indication of the stimulated aggressiveness of the Assad regime in reaction to the inaction and inertia of the international community in the face of their crimes.

This year, we commemorated the centenary of the first comprehensive use of chemical weapons in history. I believe we need to draw significant lessons from past grievances to prevent their recurrence in the future.

With this understanding, Turkey attributes utmost significance to the universalisation of the Chemical Weapons Convention and we welcome Myanmar and Angola's accession to the Convention.

On this occasion, we once again call upon those States who are not yet Party to the Chemical Weapons Convention to do so without further delay. We believe joining of those remaining countries to the Chemical Weapons Convention's regime would bolster the efforts in other disarmament fields, in particular the nuclear disarmament initiatives.

With regard to the future perspective of the OPCW, we believe that while maintaining the security and disarmament priorities of the Organisation, carrying out concrete deterrence measures against the re-emergence of chemical weapons and holding the perpetrators accountable will be crucial for the future effectiveness of the OPCW.

Last but not least, I wish to congratulate Dr Alastair Hay of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Dr Mahdi Balali-Mood of the Islamic Republic of Iran as the joint recipients of the second annual OPCW-The Hague Award.

Obviously, this award is not only spreading the message about the mission and vision of the OPCW but also provides an important incentive for furthering the objectives of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Before I conclude, I would like to request that this statement be treated as an official document of this session of the Conference of the States Parties and be posted on the external server and the website.

Thank you.

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