

Mr. Chairperson,
Excellency Director General Uzumchu,
Distinguished delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The evolution of the absolute prohibition against the use of chemical weapons has been an international development of profound importance. It embodied the international community's intolerance towards this inhumane method of warfare and its expectation that even in the midst of bitter wars, there are limitations on what is permissible. Israel participated actively in these negotiations and signed the Chemical Weapons Convention in 1993, as a sign of its support of the goals and purposes of this Treaty and that it shares the values the Treaty represents. This signature joined Israel's accession to the 1925 Geneva Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use in War of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or other Gases, and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare, its adherence to export control regimes including the AG as well as its traditional support for UNGA First Committee resolution regarding the CWC.

Unfortunately, recent years have witnessed an erosion of the absolute prohibition against the use of chemical weapons. The continued use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime, even after its accession to the CWC, is not only morally abhorrent; it is also a clear violation of the legal obligations the Syrian regime has undertaken towards the international community to forgo these weapons. There is no greater challenge to the CWC, and the norm contained therein, than a State Party using chemical weapons.

Let us be clear, the Syrian regime's use of chemical weapons is neither an isolated incident nor an aberration of conduct. These are not the actions of unruly

individuals. It is a weapon of choice of the regime and reflects a *modus operandi* of the Syrian authorities which has set up specific military units for this purposes.

As can be clearly seen from the JIM reports of August and October, as well as in reports submitted by the OPCW, there is a consistent pattern of behavior when one looks at the overall picture including Syria's motivation to join the Treaty in the first place, the gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies in the Syrian declarations to the OPCW, as well as Syria's retention of chemical weapons' capabilities including R&D.

Put together they reflect the behavior of a country reluctant to join the Treaty, and once it feels compelled to accede, wishes to explore all avenues which would allow it to conceal information, retain chemical weapons arsenals and rehabilitate them once it is no longer under international scrutiny and pressure. The Director General, in his July 4th report this year, highlighted an increase in the number of unresolved issues requiring clarification, the lack of original documentation, the lack of access to the senior leadership of the Syrian Chemical weapons program as well as the provision of information which scientifically and technically is not plausible, as some of the deficiencies pertaining to the Syrian regime's behavior.

Mr. Chairperson,

Against the backdrop of these stark circumstances, and in order to deter any future use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime as well as additional casualties stemming from such use, the international community must insist that the Syrian regime be held fully accountable for its actions. Furthermore, it must continue to insist that information which is accurate and complete regarding the Syrian chemical weapons program be made available to the Technical Secretariat of the OPCW. There are growing concerns that barring international vigilance and pressure, Syria

could rehabilitate and continue to develop its chemical weapons program, thus undermining the achievements gained so far by the removal and destruction of 1300 tons of chemical weapons in the Syrian arsenals.

In this context, Israel welcomes the extension by another year of the mandate of the JIM set up by UNSC resolution 2235. We also welcome the clear condemnation contained in this year's First Committee CWC resolution regarding the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian Arab Armed Forces as well as the condemnation contained in the OPCW's Executive Council resolutions of February 2015 and November 2016.

Mr. Chairperson,

In 1992, when the CWC was adopted, it aimed to address the challenges and threats associated with chemical weapons prevalent at the time of negotiations. Since that juncture, new threats and challenges have materialized requiring that we examine whether the tools in our disposal are enough to deal with these emerging threats. One such threat is use of chemical weapons by terrorists. Unfortunately, this is no longer a theoretical or far-removed threat. As stipulated in the August report of the JIM, Da'esh, or the so-called "Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant", has used Sulphur mustard in Syria.

Da'esh's emulation of the Syrian regime's tactical use of chemical weapons, is another problematic fallout of Syria's non-compliance with the prohibition against the use of chemical weapons. It raises real concerns that other terroristic groups

may be motivated to follow suit and attempt to acquire the knowledge, equipment or materials necessary for development and use of chemical weapons.

Given that Syria is a laboratory for terrorist activities, and taking into consideration the ease in which information flows through communication technologies and in light of the existence of porous or eroded borders, all states – not just the states of the Middle East- should worry about the prospects of broader use of chemical weapons by non-state actors. It is vital that the OPCW, in its capacity as a guardian of the absolute norm against the use of chemical weapons, step up its efforts to effectively deal with this challenge and curtail any chance for future use of chemical weapons by terroristic organizations.

Mr. Chairperson,

In conclusion, it is essential that the international community continues to insist that Syria be held fully accountable for its use of chemical weapons and its non-compliance with its international legal undertakings. The international community must be firm in its resolve that all outstanding questions regarding the Syrian declarations are clarified in an accurate and complete manner, and that until such time the Syrian chemical file remain open. There can be no fatigue in demanding that the Syrian regime live up to its obligations to the fullest. Any other message will neither benefit the Syrian people nor verify that the absolute ban on chemical weapons is upheld.

I request that this statement be placed on the OPCW's website.

Thank you