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NETHERLANDS

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR PAUL WILKE
ACTING PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE NETHERLANDS TO THE OPCW
AT THE TWENTY-FIRST SESSION OF
THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES**

Mr Chairperson,

I should like to start by thanking the outgoing Chairperson, Ambassador Eduardo Ibarrola-Nicolín of Mexico for the excellent way he guided our work during the past year. At the same time, my delegation is delighted to see you, our close neighbour, as the Chairperson of this Conference and I assure you of our full support in the exercise of your function.

The Netherlands fully aligns itself with the statement pronounced by the Representative of the European Union. Further to that statement, I take this opportunity to make the following remarks in a national capacity.

My delegation thanks the Director-General for his opening statement.

The situation surrounding the Syrian chemical weapons programme has not improved since the previous Conference. On the contrary, not only do almost all the questions regarding the Syrian initial declaration remain unanswered, but also we have been confronted with the findings of the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM).

The conclusion in the JIM's third and fourth reports, that the armed forces of the Syrian Arab Republic, a State Party to the Chemical Weapons Convention, are responsible for the use of chemical weapons in (at least) three cases, is shocking indeed.

We are content that the Executive Council took its responsibility and adopted a decision condemning the use of chemical weapons in Syria, in contravention of the Convention, of United Nations Security Council resolutions and of earlier Executive Council decisions. These blatant breaches of international law must not remain without consequences and those responsible for these acts must be held accountable. It should be clear that all States Parties to the Convention, without exception, have the obligation to do everything within their power to combat the use of chemical weapons.

More than three years after Syria's accession to the Convention, the elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme remains the most prominent issue on the agenda of the



OPCW. Despite all the measures taken and the major efforts by many, we regret to note that the Syria dossier still cannot be closed. The many uncertainties surrounding the completeness and accuracy of Syria's declarations still need to be resolved.

My delegation commends the Declaration Assessment Team for its untiring efforts in helping to provide clarity. We admire their professionalism and their patience.

But there can be no mistake that it is the Syrian Arab Republic, and Syria alone, that must provide full disclosure about its chemical weapons programme and to take away any doubts that remain about its declaration.

Another issue that has required the attention of delegations in recent months is the threat of the use of chemical weapons by non-State actors, including terrorists. The Netherlands believes that the Chemical Weapons Convention, the near-universal instrument prohibiting the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere, under any circumstance, and the OPCW as its implementing organisation have the primary role to play in the world-wide efforts to counter the threat of chemical terrorism.

We commend the work of the Open-Ended Working Group on Terrorism and its Sub-Working Group on Non-State Actors, and the leadership shown by their respective Chairpersons, Ambassador Joe Tony Aidoo of Ghana and Ambassador María Teresa Infante of Chile. Discussions in both groups have shown the scope of the threat, and the wide variety of tools available to counter the menace. The Netherlands therefore expresses the wish that the results of these discussions be laid down in an Executive Council decision, to form the basis for further deliberations on this issue.

I would be remiss if I did not mention our appreciation and admiration for the way in which the Secretariat, together with Member States, has dealt with the issue of the remaining chemical precursors in Libya. A potential threat was effectively removed in exemplary multinational cooperation. This operation is truly another feather in the OPCW's cap!

The Netherlands welcomes the fact that States Parties have reached agreement on the draft Programme and Budget for next year during the informal consultations ahead of the October session of the Executive Council. We commend the facilitators, Mr Gerhard Eisl of Austria and Mr Bahram Djamali of the Islamic Republic of Iran, for the expert manner in which they lead the consultations. We are also happy that as the Host Country we were able to contribute to the successful outcome of the budget negotiations through a continuation of our voluntary payment of the rental cost for the Conference of the States Parties.

While we are pleased with the agreement reached regarding the 2017 Budget, we express concern about the dire cash situation of the Organisation. It should be clear that all States Parties must meet their financial obligations in full and on time. Different solutions are available to countries with arrears; we call on them to make use of the options offered and to settle outstanding payments without delay.

As we have stated on previous occasions, it is essential in our view that the OPCW take the necessary steps to prepare itself for the future. It must remain equipped to perform all of its core tasks in the face of increasing challenges. While the responsibilities in the field of verification and inspection will continue, new challenges appear: preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons in spite of a growing threat of use by non-State actors, of

the spread of knowledge through cyber-space with lightning speed, of almost equally quick developments in science, including the convergence of chemistry and biology, all these factors demand a response from a Technical Secretariat that has the expertise, the professionalism and the equipment to do what needs to be done.

And it should be very clear: it is our responsibility, as States Parties, to provide the Secretariat with the resources it needs.

We very much welcome the establishment of the Open-Ended Working Group on Future Priorities. We are confident that the Co-Chairperson, Ambassador Nölke of Canada and Ambassador Koloane of South Africa, will guide the working group to a successful outcome. The first substantive meeting of the Open-Ended Working Group on Future Priorities augurs well in this regard. My delegation looks forward to actively participating in the deliberations and we stand ready to assist in other ways, if required.

The Netherlands welcomes the establishment of the Advisory Board on Education and Outreach (ABEO) and congratulates its members on their appointment. We equally welcome the report of the first meeting of the ABEO and express the confidence that the work of the ABEO will strengthen the role of the Convention by improving interaction with the chemical industry, academia and other relevant organisations. Improving relationships and cooperation with external stakeholders is key in our ever more interdependent world.

It is in this light that we welcome the representatives of chemical industry, the scientific community and civil society. Their contributions add value to our deliberations and we thank them for their participation. It is therefore with regret that we note that not all non-governmental organisations that wished to attend this Conference have been allowed to do so. Refusing an NGO solely on the basis of its country of origin, while its stated objective is the promotion of universalisation, is doing a disservice to the Convention.

In ending, I request that this statement be considered as an official document of this Conference of the States Parties, and published on the external server and the website of the OPCW. Thank you.

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