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**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR MR PHILIPPE LALLIOT
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF FRANCE TO THE OPCW AT THE
TWENTY-FIRST SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES**

Mr Chairperson,

I align myself with the statement made by the representative of the European Union.

I should like to congratulate on your election as Chairperson of the Conference of the States Parties. You have France's full trust and support in this new and demanding mission. I should also like to pay tribute to your predecessor, the Ambassador of Mexico, whose experience and skill have been invaluable to us throughout this past year.

Our Organisation will celebrate its 20th anniversary in a few months. The time has therefore come to take stock of its activities and to ask ourselves whether it has fulfilled the objectives we have set for it, and whether it is prepared to confront the challenges of today, as well as those that lie ahead.

The year will have been marked by complex topical events and intense activity. The Convention was threatened by the use of chemical weapons, proved by the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) in two reports based on the work of the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) established by the Director-General to investigate allegations of use of chemical weapons in Syria.

While the FFM had documented nine cases of established use, the JIM, established by Security Council resolution 2235 (2015), which was adopted unanimously, concluded that the Syrian Government, through its regular army, on three occasions used chlorine against the Syrian people between April 2014 and March 2015. The JIM also concluded that Da'esh was responsible for using mustard gas in August 2015.

Faced with these indisputable findings, documented and established by independent and internationally recognised experts, what could the OPCW do? The Executive Council worked tirelessly for a month, ultimately adopting a decision on 11 November as it closed its Eighty-Third Session. This decision, one of the most important ever to be adopted by the Executive Council, preserves the legitimacy of the Organisation and further reinforces its credibility.

The decision condemns the Syrian regime and Da'esh for using these inhumane weapons against the Syrian people. It calls for those responsible for those attacks to be held accountable for their actions, and calls on all actors concerned to desist from using these



weapons and from breaching the Convention. Finally, with the Syrian authorities showing little willingness to meet their declaration obligations, at a time when the use of chemical weapons in Syria by that very government has now been proved and documented, the decision allows for the establishment of a strengthened verification regime, in particular as regards the research and development centre for Syrian chemical weapons.

I would recall that Damascus had always refused to declare the centre, claiming that it was not related to its chemical programme. The moment of truth has now come for the Syrian Government. In addition to giving answers, and it is high time to give them at last, it must fulfil all of its obligations, including financial ones.

The decision is a credit to the Organisation: it gives us the opportunity to show that when the Convention is breached, when the non-proliferation regime that underpins it is threatened, and when international law is flouted, the OPCW is present, its members take action, and its bodies assume their responsibilities. This is an ambitious decision and, as such, it fully respects the spirit and letter of the Convention by stating this: when someone uses chemical weapons, they must be held accountable for their acts. The decision should be reflected in the report of this session of the Conference.

The international community did not get it wrong. First, the United Nations Security Council, after establishing the JIM, extended its mandate for another year by adopting, unanimously once again, resolution 2319 (2016). Accordingly, the JIM, its working methods, and its findings have been endorsed by the highest international authority, thanks in particular to the work of our Organisation. This decision is all the more important considering that we continue to receive allegations of use of chemical weapons. We are counting on the expertise, courage, and professionalism of the Technical Secretariat staff to continue their mission, often under very difficult circumstances.

Today, we must also ask ourselves if the OPCW has the necessary resources to face this new challenge constituted by the use of chemical weapons, in particular by non-State actors, as also proved by the reports of the FFM and the JIM. The situation is alarming in Iraq and Syria, where Da'esh continues to spread death and terror. There was a risk that it would become problematic in Libya, where we responded with unity and effectiveness to remove from a danger zone the final chemical precursors from Libyan territory, through determined and coordinated action.

Confronted with the proven use of chemical weapons, as well as with new allegations, and after living up to its task, who better than the OPCW, provided it is suitably resourced and led with the same intelligence that it is today, will be able to play a role tomorrow in the fight against the re-emergence and use of chemical weapons?

We have just created an open-ended working group on the future priorities of the OPCW, co-chaired by the Ambassador of Canada and the Ambassador of South Africa, whose commitment and professionalism I wish to commend. There are a great many topics before us. France is of the view that they must all be examined through the prism of the recent challenges and the current context, and of the new role that the Organisation should play on the international stage. You can count on the commitment of my country and, bearing this in mind, France will be a source of proposals. Likewise, we will continue to focus on the essential issue of the fight against the threat of use of chemical weapons by non-State actors.

France will also remain strongly committed to the work that has been brilliantly led by the Ambassador of Chile within the sub-working group on non-State actors.

In this context, we must not only ask ourselves about the future missions of the OPCW but also about the resources, both financial and human, that we wish to put at its disposal. We must work to ensure that the Technical Secretariat is in a position to respond to these new challenges. We must work to ensure that all States Parties pay their national contributions on time. This is a problem that we currently face and which poses a significant risk to the activities of the Organisation. We cannot accept this situation today, and we will not accept it tomorrow.

The OPCW is working towards a vision, that of a world without chemical weapons. This vision comes with a collective responsibility. Peace and international security are at stake, nothing more and nothing less. You can count on the commitment of France in this endeavour and in this fight. We owe it to the future generations.

I thank you, Mr Chairperson, and would ask that this statement be considered as an official document of this Twenty-First Session of the Conference of the States Parties.

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