



**OPCW**

**Conference of the States Parties**

Twenty-Second Session  
27 November – 1 December 2017

C-22/NAT.20  
28 November 2017  
ENGLISH only

**NETHERLANDS**

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR PAUL VAN DEN IJSSEL  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE NETHERLANDS TO THE OPCW AT THE  
TWENTY-SECOND SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES**

Mr Chairperson,

The Netherlands fully aligns itself with the statement delivered by the Representative of Estonia on behalf of the European Union. Further to that statement, I would like to make some additional remarks.

My delegation would like to thank Director-General Üzümcü for his opening statement. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Director-General Üzümcü for his tireless efforts and outstanding leadership to promote the goals of the OPCW and uphold the norm of the Chemical Weapons Convention during his tenure at the Organisation. It was and is a privilege to work with you and I am very pleased that we will still have another six months to work together. Nevertheless, since this is your last Conference of the States Parties as Director-General, I take this opportunity to wish you all the best in your future endeavours, both professionally and in your private life.

During this Conference we will appoint Ambassador Arias as the new Director-General who will take over from Director-General Üzümcü. And once again I would like to congratulate Ambassador Arias and we look forward to work with him. I assure you of the full support of my delegation and of the host nation.

The OPCW is well under way of destroying all declared chemical weapons, with the completion of the destruction of the declared stockpiles in the Russian Federation – with which we commend again and congratulate the Russian Federation – as the latest success.

But let us not forget that the baseline of the Convention is the prohibition of the use of chemical weapons. And in recent years the world has been deeply shocked by attacks with chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic. The horrific images of the victims, mostly civilians, men, women and children have left an everlasting impact on many of us. The Netherlands condemns in the strongest possible terms the use of chemical weapons by both the Syrian Arab Republic and Daesh, or for that matter by any State or non-State actor. The gravity of the most recent attacks reported by the OPCW-United Nations and Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) in its seventh report are without comparison. It is for the fourth time that the Syrian Arab Republic is reported to have used chemicals as a weapon against its own people.



As we have expressed at several occasions the perpetrators of attacks with chemical weapons must be held accountable. The use of chemical weapons constitutes a war crime and a crime against humanity and those responsible should be brought to justice. In this regard the Netherlands welcomes the creation of the international, impartial, and independent mechanism established by United Nations General Assembly resolution 71/248. We urge the OPCW to share all relevant information - within legal boundaries - on the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic with this mechanism. This will ensure that the invaluable work done by the Fact-Finding Mission and JIM in establishing the use of chemical weapons and determining those responsible for this use, is not a last step, but one on the path leading to justice. Let me repeat again what the Netherlands has stated before: accountability is neither optional nor negotiable.

The latest Fact-Finding report of earlier this month (2 November) indicates that most likely sarin was used on 30 March of this year in Ltamenah. This should have been a clear and undeniable message to all State Parties that the work of the JIM is far from over. In its reports so far, the JIM has been able, in a number of cases, to identify the perpetrators of attacks with chemical weapons. Moreover, several other cases of confirmed or likely use of chemical weapons need to be investigated. It is all the more important that we fully support the urgent renewal of the JIM mandate to send a strong signal against impunity, and for it to continue investigating additional cases of confirmed use or likely use.

However, the mandate of the JIM expired on 16 November and the Security Council has not been able to take a decision on renewal of the mandate, due to the veto of the Russian Federation. In our opinion this behaviour is irresponsible. The international community has the obligation to do whatever it can to uphold the norm of the Chemical Weapons Convention and safeguard innocent civilians from being attacked with chemical weapons. Furthermore, the Netherlands calls upon all members of the Chemical Weapons Convention who have not yet done so, to voice their commitment to the Convention and to condemn the use of chemical weapons by both the Syrian Arab Republic and Daesh. That the international community still has not spoken with one voice to support the seventh JIM report is disturbing and as such, poses a grave danger to the norm that the use of chemical weapons is never permitted, by anyone, under any circumstance. There is no room to ignore the facts or to be indifferent on this matter.

On the issue of the admission of NGO's to the Conference my delegation would like to refer to the statement made by the Ambassador of Canada on this topic, made also on behalf of the Netherlands and other Member States.

In conclusion, the Netherlands attaches great value to the international legal order as a means to prevent injustice and armed conflicts and has been for many decades a staunch supporter of international organisations active in this field. My country is therefore proud to be hosting the OPCW, as the Organisation is a crucial element in upholding the standards of international law with regards to the prohibition of chemical weapons. We will continue to do our utmost to facilitate the work of the Organisation.

I would like to request that this statement be considered as an official document of this Conference, and published on the external server and the website of the OPCW.

Thank you.