



**OPCW**

**Conference of the States Parties**

Twenty-Second Session  
27 November – 1 December 2017

C-22/NAT.12  
28 November 2017  
ENGLISH and FRENCH only

**SWITZERLAND**

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR URS BREITER  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF SWITZERLAND TO THE OPCW AT THE  
TWENTY-SECOND SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES**

Mr Chairperson,

Allow me to join previous speakers in expressing my congratulations for your election as Chairperson of the Twenty-Second Conference of the States Parties. You can count on my delegation's full support and cooperation.

Over the past year, the Syrian file has once again been at the centre of our concerns. In its latest report, established after a thorough, impartial and professional investigation, the OPCW-United Nations Joint-Investigative Mechanism (JIM) has identified the Arab Syrian Republic as responsible for the sarin gas attack in Khan Shaykhun on 4 April, 2017. Switzerland deeply regrets that no compromise could be made in order to renew the JIM's mandate. Indeed, the Fact-Finding Mission's (FFM) recent conclusions illustrate the need for the JIM to continue its work.

Switzerland is preoccupied with the outcome of the Executive Council's Fifty-Sixth Session. If the Council is not able to condemn the use of chemical weapons and decide on concrete measures to prevent its reoccurrence, its credibility is seriously undermined. Last year, when the JIM concluded that the Syrian Arab Armed Forces had used chlorine gas, the Executive Council did not remain silent. We are today in an impasse out of which we must find a way out. Do we want to remain passive when the OPCW, pillar of the edifice of disarmament and non-proliferation, is at risk of turning into an empty shell? Isn't it our collective responsibility to strengthen the Organisation rather than weaken it? The only way forward is to engage in an inclusive dialogue. The future of the OPCW is at stake and we must find an adequate answer to the flagrant violations of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

With regard to Khan Shaykhun, the sarin gas used in the attack in April should never have been in the possession of the Syrian Arab Republic. Haven't we been told, time and time again, that this warfare agent as well as the precursors used for its production, were completely destroyed during the Syrian chemical weapons destructions operations? Unfortunately, we note conference after conference that the discrepancies and irregularities of the Syrian Arab Republic's initial declaration have yet to be resolved. This is totally unacceptable.

The JIM has also identified the self-proclaimed group 'Islamic State' as responsible for the mustard gas attack in Um-Housh on 15 and 16 September 2016. It is the second time that the



Mechanism has reached such a conclusion. The repeated use of chemical weapons by non-State actors is extremely preoccupying.

Switzerland condemns in the strongest terms possible the use of chemical weapons by any actor in the Syrian Arab Republic. International law demands of all States that they prosecute the perpetrators of such acts. We reiterate our call to the Security Council to refer the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic to the International Criminal Court. Impunity for these crimes is not acceptable and enhances the probability of recurrence.

Throughout this year, States Parties seized the issue of future priorities within the Open-ended Working Group. A large number of delegations mentioned that the prevention of the re-emergence of chemical weapons is one of their main concerns. In this respect, Switzerland reiterated its conviction regarding the need to launch an open and inclusive discussion within the OPCW policy-making organs on the use of central nervous system-acting chemicals (CNS-acting chemicals) for law enforcement purposes. I wish to repeat that we in no way want to preempt the outcome of this discussion. Together with Australia, we are pursuing our commitment in order to raise awareness amongst regional groups on this issue. Nearly 40 States Parties have joined the joint paper on the “Aerosolisation of Central Nervous System-Acting Chemicals for Law Enforcement Purposes” that is resubmitted this year to the Conference. I encourage all States Parties to join the paper and invite them to participate in the side-event we are organising today, at 1 p.m. in the Europe Room.

Advances in science and technology (S&T) pose significant challenges to international treaties. To keep abreast of these challenges, Switzerland will convene a third workshop in September 2018 to discuss the convergence of chemistry and biology and how modern advances in S&T may affect the Chemical and Biological Weapons Conventions. We will make the workshop outcome available in a report. Another workshop we would like to bring to your attention is the second OPCW workshop on Schedule 1 facilities, the so-called “Schedule 1 Users Forum”. Switzerland will host this workshop in January 2018 at the Spiez Laboratory in cooperation with the Technical Secretariat. The objective is to bring together practitioners of declared Schedule 1 facilities and give them a unique platform to share their experiences.

We support the 2018 programme and budget and wish to underline the efforts made by the Technical Secretariat. Nevertheless, these efforts are mitigated by the liquidity issues the Organisation faces due to arrears. This lack of responsible attitude of States Parties towards their financial obligations is unacceptable and sanctions should be considered.

20 years ago, the Convention on the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons entered into force. 2017 is therefore a symbolic year, as approximately 96 per cent of chemical weapons stockpiles declared by possessor States have been eliminated. Switzerland congratulates the Russian Federation for the total destruction of its chemical weapons declared stockpile following the end of the Kizner operations. We must preserve the Convention’s integrity and successfully pursue the OPCW’s main aim of a world free of chemical weapons.

Lastly, Switzerland welcomes the nomination of Ambassador Fernando Arias as the new Director-General of the OPCW. His seriousness, commitment and professionalism are assets that will enable him to perform the important tasks that await him. As it is the last Conference of the States Parties for the current Director-General, Ahmed Üzümcü, I wish to address him

with my most sincere gratitude for the extraordinary work he has accomplished. Throughout his mandate, he skilfully steered the Organisation through, at times, turbulent and tumultuous waters. Under his able leadership, the Organisation experienced a new momentum in the pursuit of its noble mission.

Thank you.

--- 0 ---