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RUSSIAN FEDERATION

**STATEMENT BY G. V. KALAMANOV
DEPUTY MINISTER OF INDUSTRY AND TRADE
HEAD OF THE DELEGATION OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION AT THE
TWENTY-SECOND SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES**

Mr Chairperson, Mr Director-General, distinguished delegates,

Please allow me to congratulate you on behalf of the Russian delegation, Mr Chairperson, on your election to such an important and responsible post. We are certain that under your leadership, the work of the Twenty-Second Session of the Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention will progress in an atmosphere of mutual understanding, objectivity, and constructive collaboration and that decisions will be taken in a spirit of political tolerance and based on a consensus.

First and foremost, I would like to fulfil my duties and relay here in this honourable hall a personal message from the President of the Russian Federation V. V. Putin to the delegates at the Twenty-Second Session of the Conference:

“To the delegates of the Twenty-Second Session of the Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention

Distinguished delegates,

I welcome you on the occasion of the Twentieth Anniversary of the coming into force of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

This celebratory year is commemorated with the complete elimination of Russian chemical weapons. On 27 September 2017, the last of our country’s chemical munitions was destroyed at the Kizner facility in the Udmurt Republic.

This is without a doubt an important step on the path to a more sustainable and stable world. The elimination of chemical weapons in Russia was carried out under strict international control and in full compliance with the provisions of the Convention. We voice our gratitude to the OPCW Technical Secretariat and the States Parties for many years of close cooperation. We look forward to continued effective cooperation with this Organisation.

We call upon States in possession of chemical weapons to follow our example and make every effort to complete, in the soonest possible time, the destruction of their remaining stockpiles. And we urge those countries that still remain outside of the international legal field



of the Convention to accede without delay. I am confident that a demonstration of firm political resolve will help us realise our common goal: achieving a world free of chemical weapons.

I wish all of the participants of the Conference productive work in achieving all of the goals set out in the Convention.”

The Chemical Weapons Convention has truly become one of the most effective multilateral mechanisms in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation, effectively supporting the foundation of international security. Currently, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons brings together 192 countries around the world. Since 1997, impressive results have been achieved: the elimination of 96% of a total of over 72,000 tonnes of chemicals subject to destruction under the Convention. In other words, we are very close to freeing the world from these deadly weapons.

As our President has noted, this celebratory year for the Convention was also significant for our country: the federal target programme for the destruction of chemical weapons stockpiles was successfully completed. As a result, the Russian Federation has made a substantial contribution to the elimination of this extremely dangerous type of weapon of mass destruction. For us, it was especially important that in spite of financial, economic, and technological challenges, the destruction process for the largest stockpile of chemical weapons in the world—initially amounting to approximately 40,000 tonnes—was completed as soon as possible. And our country achieved this under strict international control three years earlier than the established deadline.

As a representative of the National Authority of the Russian Federation for the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention, I join our President in voicing gratitude to the OPCW Technical Secretariat; separately, I would like to note those countries that contributed roughly 10% of the total volume of the budgetary funds spent by our country. They are: Belgium, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Italy, Canada, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, the United States of America, Germany, Finland, France, the Czech Republic, Switzerland, and Sweden.

The policy-making organs of the OPCW always worked smoothly, the States Parties knew how to reach an agreement, and as a result, all decisions were traditionally taken based on a consensus. Proof of this also lies in the development and implementation—in unprecedented tight deadlines and in complex military and political circumstances—of the programme to eliminate the military chemical potential of the Syrian Arab Republic. Thanks to this noble mission, disputes were put to the side and all efforts were focussed on achieving one goal: the chemical demilitarisation of Syria. Of course, this kind of success in such an unprecedented matter could not have been possible without the political will and dedication of the Syrian authorities.

At the same time, it is with regret that we must state that following the confirmation by the Secretariat of the completion of the elimination of the military chemical potential of Syria, the situation surrounding the so-called “chemical dossier” of said State Party to the Convention was only ratcheted up via the aims of a group of countries to use the situation for their own political interests. Discussions on the matter took on an increasingly political nature. The Syrian Arab Republic has faced and continues to face more new and absolutely unfounded accusations regarding its initial declaration under the Convention concerning the

use of chemicals and toxic chemical warfare agents, allegedly against numerous militant opposition groups and the civil population. In other words, a sovereign government—a Party to the Convention, that has been fighting against extremism and terrorism sponsored from outside parties for years now—is being subjected to double standards, thus having a wholly negative impact on the integrity of the Convention as well as the authority of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons itself.

In response to the latest surge of anti-Syrian “emotions” within this forum, I would like to emphasise that the Syrian Arab Republic acceded to the Convention in 2013, and in doing so made the definitive choice in favour of the complete rejection of chemical weapons. From the very beginning, like no other State Party to the Convention, it has demonstrated an unprecedented level of transparency, including in matters concerning the now distant history of its military chemical programme, in addition to its consistent willingness to cooperate with the Secretariat. This is wholly demonstrated by Damascus’ collaboration in the establishment, with its agreement, of two OPCW missions: the Declaration Assessment Team and the Fact-Finding Mission.

No questions remain concerning the former. They may request additional explanations, in spite of the fact that Damascus has already submitted extensive materials for this purpose, but these would be purely technical in nature and without any politicised pressure from a certain group of interested States.

With regard to the latter—namely, the Fact-Finding Mission in Syria—our scepticism is well known. From the very beginning of its three years of activities, we have constantly observed serious deviations from the fundamental provisions and procedures set out in the Convention and its Verification Annex. First and foremost, this concerns the remote methods used to collect evidence based on information from the Syrian opposition and noncompliance with the chain of custody principle for evidence.

Within this context, I cannot help but also mention the unacceptable situation created recently by our Western partners in the “Big Five” of the United Nations Security Council and their “associates”—a number of non-permanent members of this body—regarding the issue of extending the mandate of the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism investigating instances of the use of chemical weapons in Syria. The very fact that our American colleagues literally two days before the release of the next—seventh—report of the JIM on the high-profile chemical incident in the Syrian village of Khan Shaykhun attempted to push a decision on the automatic extension of the mandate of this structure speaks volumes. What followed on the floor of the United Nations Security Council were actions that were cynical in nature, including the blockage of the joint draft resolution proposed by Russia, China, and Bolivia on extending and reinforcing the mandate of the JIM, which not only “killed” the JIM itself, but once again demonstrated an aim to use an authoritative international organisation, be it the United Nations or the OPCW, for the purposes of their own geopolitical ambitions with regard to the situation in Syria and the Middle East in general.

In order to avoid misusing my time, I will not repeat our altogether critical assessments of the activities of the JIM over the past two years. I will limit myself and only recommend that all delegates and participants of the Conference familiarise themselves very carefully with the materials published on the closed section of the OPCW website (the “extranet”) entitled “Additional Assessment of the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism

Seventh Report”, which sets out a scientifically substantiated analysis of the conclusions of the seventh JIM report on the chemical incident in Khan Shaykhun, conducted by our military and chemical experts. Simply, this material will convince readers of the extent to which the methods adopted by the leaders of the JIM and the special OPCW Fact-Finding Mission to investigate instances of the use of chemical weapons in Syria are unprofessional and politically motivated. There was likely a directive to—by any means possible—confirm the main version pushed by Washington and several other Western capitals with regard to the bombing in Khan Shaykhun by the Syrian Armed Forces using chemical munitions. That version justifies the missile strike against the Syrian al-Shayrat airbase by the American Air Force—but this was an act of aggression against a sovereign State and a violation of the United Nations Charter and generally recognised norms of international law.

I would especially like to emphasise that the Russian Federation has, in the strongest possible terms, condemned crimes involving the use of chemical weapons, by anyone, anywhere. We believe it is necessary in each specific case to establish the truth, the perpetrators, and hold them accountable. At the same time, this type of verdict can only be made based on irrefutable evidence.

The inordinate politicisation of the so-called “Syrian dossier” is having an extremely negative impact on the integrity of the Convention and the authority of the OPCW itself. Moreover, the ceaseless and completely unfounded accusations that Damascus used toxic chemicals and toxic chemical warfare agents only play into the hands of the terrorists and extremists, who are, with outside support, undertaking more and new provocative actions using household—and now military grade—chemicals. And their goal is all too clear: to discredit the legitimate, elected Government of the Syrian Arab Republic.

It is also clear that while maintaining a similarly unacceptable state of affairs, the repeated occurrences of chemical terrorism will sooner or later move beyond the borders of Syria, Iraq, and the entire Middle Eastern region, which is something that should have been considered long ago by those who either directly or indirectly contributed to this dangerous situation.

Over the course of several years now the Russian Federation, together with other likeminded parties, across all levels and within all relevant international formats—first and foremost at the United Nations Security Council—has been raising the issue of the urgent need to develop joint actions to counter chemical terrorism. However, none of our initiatives have found their due support from a number of Western countries.

We firmly believe that the OPCW must work more actively on achieving a high-quality improvement of its capabilities to respond to these types of challenges and threats. In this regard, we are pleased with the decision adopted at the Eighty-Sixth Session of the Executive Council on countering chemical terrorist threats posed by non-State actors. This decision is clear evidence of the fact that the spirit of consensus within the OPCW is still alive and that with good faith, the Organisation can again take these important types of decisions unanimously.

We also believe that States Parties to the Convention can play a driving role in carrying out our joint initiative with a number of other States at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva to develop an international convention on the fight against chemical and biological

terrorist attacks which, as we know, is supported by many countries who are also members of this Organisation.

The Russian Federation was one of the founding countries of the Chemical Weapons Convention and is dedicated to globally strengthening this effective multilateral treaty, as well as the authority of the OPCW. We firmly believe that universality of the Convention is a top priority.

One more pressing task is the need to bring the legislation of all States Parties into line with the provisions of the Convention. It is important to put into place consistent control over national chemical industries. Furthermore, it is also important to maintain a balance between effective verification and minimising the verification burden on a company, so as not to create an obstacle to the development of international cooperation in the chemical industry. Without improving national legislative bases, government agencies cannot take the appropriate actions to strengthen the non-proliferation regime.

As we approach the upcoming Fourth Review Conference in 2018, it is important to continue the discussion on the future priorities of the OPCW within the framework of the corresponding Open-Ended Working Group while taking into account, including among other things the prevention of the reemergence of chemical weapons, a task that has come to the forefront.

The Russian Federation is fully interested in ensuring that the OPCW, in light of its unique character, retains its effectiveness and ability to promptly and adequately respond to new challenges and threats, is able to carry out its activities in an non-politicised manner, and takes all decisions based on a consensus.

Guided by these very considerations, we worked together with our Belarusian, Venezuelan, Iranian, and Chinese colleagues as co-authors, we propose that the States Parties to the Convention align themselves with a joint statement entitled “United for the World Free of Chemical Weapons”.

In conclusion, we would like to welcome the nomination at the Eighty-Sixth Session of the Council of the Permanent Representative of Spain to the OPCW, Mr Fernando Arias, for the post of Director-General of the Technical Secretariat of the OPCW. We believe that under his skillful leadership, we will be able to overcome today’s very complex period in the process of the OPCW’s evolutionary development and restore its inherent spirit of consensus.

Mr Chairperson,

We assure you that the Russian delegation intends to work constructively and that you may rely fully on our support.

I request that this statement be circulated as an official document of the Twenty-Second Session of the Conference of the States Parties.