

NORWAY

Statement by H.E. Ambassador Martin Sørby, Permanent Representative of Norway to the OPCW, at the 22nd Session of the Conference of States Parties in The Hague 27. November – 1. December 2017

Mr Chairperson,

I congratulate you on being elected to chair this Session of the Conference of States Parties. We look forward to cooperating with you, and assure you of Norway's full support in addressing the tasks before us. Let me also thank the outgoing Chairperson for the excellent way in which he has conducted the work of the Conference.

Norway is aligned with the statement made on behalf of the EU. I would like to highlight a few issues of particular importance to Norway.

Mr Chairperson,

Norway welcomes the completion of the destruction of declared chemical weapons in the Russian Federation in October this year. It is truly a milestone in the history of the Chemical Weapons Convention. It further demonstrates how the OPCW and states parties supporting this effort can make an impact and help rid the world of these weapons of mass destruction. Norway is proud to have contributed to this end.

We also welcome the completion of the destruction of the Libyan chemical weapons in Germany, as well as the progress made by Iraqi authorities to destroy the last remnants of the chemical weapons from the Saddam Hussein era.

Meanwhile, the picture is bleak in Syria. We were deeply disturbed to learn that the latest report of the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism, JIM, concluded that the Syrian Arab Republic was responsible for the release of sarin at Khan Sheikhoun, Syria, on 4 April 2017. The report also concluded that ISIL was responsible for the use of sulphur mustard at Um-Housh on September 15 and 16, in 2016. Norway strongly condemns the use of chemical weapons under any circumstance. These attacks must stop. Those responsible must be held to account.

Norway fully supports the professional and indispensable work done by the OPCW and the JIM. We deeply regret that the Security Council was unable to secure an extension of JIM's mandate and that we currently have no independent mechanism to investigate these heinous acts and identify those responsible.

It is moreover troubling that nearly three years after the entire Syrian chemical weapons programme was thought to have been shipped out of Syria on Danish and Norwegian vessels for destruction, questions and uncertainties still linger over the declaration and information submitted by the Syrian government. Norway calls on Syrian authorities to cooperate fully with the OPCW and the UN, and to comply with the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Norway was also deeply concerned over the use of the nerve agent VX in a fatal incident on 13 February 2017 at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport.

Mr Chairperson,

The Chemical Weapons Convention and the OPCW have together for the past 20 years been a success. More than 96% of all declared chemical weapons have been destroyed. The OPCW was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2013 under the very able leadership of Director General Üzümcü.

Today, the Convention and the OPCW are facing difficult challenges. The taboo against the use of chemical weapons is being challenged. There is no longer consensus around the annual resolution in the UN General Assembly's First Committee. And we, as an international community, are struggling to address blatant violations of the Convention. We have however full confidence that ambassador Fernando Arias will take on these challenges with dexterity and wisdom as new Director General.

Mr Chairperson,

The convention has reached near universality over the past few years. We call for the immediate ratification or accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention of the remaining States not yet party.

The OPCW must continue its efforts to foster international cooperation in peaceful uses of chemistry. For many State Parties, this is a major incentive for staying engaged with the OPCW. Norway is committed to Art. XI and has supported relevant OPCW-programmes, such as the Africa Programme.

Verification and inspections, and possibly challenge inspections, should continue to be a core task for the OPCW. The organisation will also need to continue its work on preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons, based on the established «Hague Ethical Guidelines», as well as its outreach and cooperation with science and industry.

Technological and scientific development takes place at an increasingly rapid speed. The OPCW must in the future address challenges that today might be unknown. The increasing fusion of the scientific fields of chemistry and biology lays the ground for development of new and innovative technologies, to name but one example.

The Scientific Advisory Board plays an essential role in identifying new challenges. Their findings and recommendations must be included in the future work of the organisation.

Norway is concerned about the risk of non-state actors acquiring chemical weapons for terrorism, as we have witnessed in Syria and Iraq. The open-ended working group on future priorities must continue its work with this in mind.

Thank you for your attention.