



UK Delegation to the OPCW

National Statement to the 30th Session of the Conference of States Parties

**by Damian Johnson MBE, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern
Ireland**

Mr Chair, Director General, Distinguished Delegates,

I would like to begin by thanking the Director-General and the Technical Secretariat for their work to prepare for this Conference. I would also like to thank the Director General for his comprehensive overview of the work he has led this year to strengthen this organisation.

Many thanks also to our outgoing Chair, Ambassador Almir Šahović for effectively steering this Conference this past year. My congratulations to Ambassador Agustín Vásquez Gómez of El Salvador on your appointment as Chair of this Conference – you have the UK's full support.

Mr Chair,

The Chemical Weapons Convention remains a fundamental pillar of international security. The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons has overseen the complete destruction of all declared chemical weapon stockpiles. Countries are better prepared to detect and respond to the use of chemical weapons. Yet, while the safety and security of so many of us sat here today has increased due to the OPCW's tireless work, the threat posed by chemical weapons remains. We must continue our work to rid the world of chemical weapons and hold to account those who continue to use them.

Mr Chair,

In pursuit of this goal, the UK is fully committed to supporting Syria and the Technical Secretariat to finally eradicate Assad's legacy chemical weapons programme. The UK has committed £2.8m to the OPCW Syria Voluntary Trust Fund since December 2024. I am pleased to announce that, in the coming months, the UK will be committing a further multi-million pound funding effort for Syrian led destruction operations.

At the time of the Assad Regime's collapse last December, there remained concerns that large quantities of potentially undeclared or unverified chemical weapons agents and munitions remained in Syria. The current status, quantities, and locations of such agents and materials remain unknown.

But, as we meet today, Syria and the Technical Secretariat are working together to account for Assad's chemical weapons, and to pave the way for their final, complete and verified destruction – thereby protecting the Syrian people and contributing to regional security. We welcome the re-establishment of a Syrian National Authority and the appointment of a new Permanent Representative.

States Parties must now capitalise on the recently agreed Qatari-Syrian Executive Council Decision on Expedited On-Site Destruction and the progress made to date, to help Syria accelerate its operations in-country. This includes ongoing efforts to identify, locate and secure Assad's chemical weapons, in parallel to addressing discrepancies in the former regime's declaration. The OPCW Office for Special Missions will also continue its work to attribute numerous chemical weapon attacks that took place in Syria since 2013. The task ahead is considerable. We encourage all States Parties to support the Secretariat and Syria to close this file through financial and in-kind contributions. The UK is fully committed to supporting Syria and the Secretariat in this endeavour.

Mr Chair,

This Conference will elect three members of the Eastern Europe Group on to the Executive Council. The Russian Federation has once again submitted its candidacy to represent the Eastern European Group on the Executive Council. The overwhelming majority of the Eastern European Group do not support this candidacy. Their opposition is rooted in a simple but fundamental truth: Russia is a State Party that repeatedly violates the Chemical Weapons Convention and consistently undermines the credibility of this Organisation.

We cannot permit a State that breaches the Convention to make decisions on how it is implemented. The Executive Council must be a body of integrity - one that upholds the Convention's principles and strengthens the OPCW. We urge all Member States to respect the wishes of the Eastern European Group and, in doing so, defend the credibility of this organisation.

Ukraine has reported over 11,000 Russian uses of toxic chemicals since Russia launched its war of aggression in 2022. Dutch and German security services have concluded that Russia is escalating its use of chemical weapons. The Secretariat has now independently confirmed the presence of CS gas in samples from multiple incidents in Ukraine and these incidents must now be attributed. We will continue to support Ukraine to protect its people against these attacks, and hold Russia to account for its actions.

We are pleased to have worked once again with Canada on the joint procurement of respirators for Ukraine, with the first batch of these having already been delivered to the Ukrainian front-line. This is in addition to the £950,000 that the UK has contributed to the OPCW Assistance to Ukraine fund.

Russia's disregard for its obligations under the Convention is well established. Russia used the highly toxic nerve agent, a Novichok on British soil in 2018, leading to the death of Dawn Sturgess. It used a Novichok again to poison Alexei Navalny in 2020. These are appalling examples of flagrant breaches of the convention.

And they have set a damaging example. We remain deeply concerned by reports of chemical weapon use in Sudan. Sudan has committed to investigate reports of use of chemical weapons by the Sudanese Armed Forces thoroughly. We expect the outcomes of these investigations soon.

Mr Chair,

The UK remains committed to supporting international cooperation and assistance as a central pillar of the OPCW's work. The UK has supported capacity building in East Africa and the Caribbean and I am pleased to highlight that the UK and Ghanaian national authorities are now working closely together. This builds on the success of historical UK national authority mentoring initiatives including, most recently, with Zambia. And on the subject of building success – the UK looks forward to being involved and supporting CHEMEX Africa 2 in 2026, which will build on the lessons learned from the first such exercise in 2023.

The UK was delighted to join last year's CSP side-event with Czechia, Switzerland, and the OPCW, which highlighted our work on assistance and protection, and the ongoing value of member states working together on this vital issue. We strongly encourage the continuation of this, both with the OPCW and with partners such as the Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons of Mass Destruction, led positively and proactively by Canada this year.

Industry verification is a cornerstone of the Convention, ensuring compliance and building the foundation for trust among States Parties. The UK therefore welcomes the return to 241 Article VI inspections in 2027 agreed in the budget and calls for adequate resources to be devoted to the verification regime on an ongoing basis.

We commend the Director-General's leadership on emerging technologies, and we look forward to the outcome of the Scientific Advisory Board's review. We also applaud the OPCW's work to increase geographical representation, enhance engagement with civil society and promote gender equality - especially as we mark the 25th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.

Mr Chair,

This occasion is tinged with sadness. For the last time at this Conference, the UK thanks his Excellency, Director General Arias, for leading the Secretariat through a period of significant challenge and change. We recognise his deft diplomacy and applaud his commitment to the Convention. He leaves the Secretariat stronger and better prepared for the future. In the Chem Tech Centre, he leaves tangible proof of his legacy.

We congratulate Ambassador Dallafior Matter on securing the Executive Council's recommendation for appointment as the next Director General of this organisation. You can count on the UK's full support.

Thank you.