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POLAND

**STATEMENT BY MR JACEK CZAPUTOWICZ
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AT THE FOURTH SPECIAL SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE THE STATES
PARTIES**

Director-General,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,

The context of our meeting today is clear: the fundamental norm which prohibits the use of chemical weapons is being openly challenged, in the Middle East, in Asia, and in Europe. The recent chemical weapons attacks in Syria, Iraq, Malesia and the United Kingdom raise serious questions not only about integrity and validity of the Chemical Weapons Convention (the Convention), but in a broader sense—about the future of chemical disarmament and non-proliferation regimes.

It is with great concern that we received news on a possible use of chlorine in Saraqib in February and sarin and chlorine in Al-Lataminah in March this year, as described in the reports of the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission (FFM). Together with the attack in Douma, these are the upsetting examples of horrible crimes whose perpetrators are enjoying impunity.

The use of chemical weapons is not limited to the badly-affected civilian population of Syria. At the same time we have to face the re-appearance of the use of chemical weapons in Asia and in Europe, both continents that suffered so much from these inhuman weapons in the past. We have to cope with the question why do we nowadays have to witness the re-emergence of the threat which we thought was already behind us, despite:

- such negative experience in the past,
- the commonly shared condemnation of any use of chemical weapons,
- almost universal prohibition of such weapons embodied in the Convention and in the international humanitarian law?

Poland deeply believes that one of the reasons for chemical weapons still being used is the impunity of the perpetrators. This is why we share the common view that any use of chemical weapons cannot be left without an adequate reaction.

As a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council in the years 2018-19, Poland is guided by the principles of solidarity, responsibility and engagement, also in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.



We strongly believe that, in the current situation when the Convention is under enormous pressure, a strong and united message of support for the comprehensive and universal implementation of the Convention with all its pillars is needed more than ever. Inaction is not an option here.

Therefore, we decided to join the group of countries which have called for a special session of the Conference of the States Parties of the Chemical Weapons Convention. In our assessment there is an urgent need to reiterate political commitment of all States Parties to the principles and objectives of the Convention. It is also necessary to clearly and unconditionally condemn the latest uses of these inhuman weapons. This session is an excellent opportunity to protest against chemical weapons use and to consider what we have to do to support the existing norms.

For years Poland has been the author and the sole sponsor of the United Nations resolution on the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention. Since 2013 we have been facing the horrific reality: chemical weapons have reappeared and the Member States of the United Nations remain divided on this issue.

A century ago the use of chemical weapons was a way of waging wars. Not so long ago, we commemorated one hundred years since chemical weapons were used for the first time on the frontlines of World War I, both in the West and East. French, British, and other allied soldiers were targeted with chlorine in Ypres, while Russian Empire's soldiers were dying of the same gruesome weapons in Bolimów, which is today's Poland. Now, a century later, we are being confronted with these ghastly weapons yet again. Our nations experienced the effects of the very same toxic gas that is now killing civilians who seek refuge in the cellars of Ghouta and other places in Syria.

In 1997 we turned a new page in the history of non-proliferation and disarmament—chemical weapons were effectively banned by the Convention. All of us gathered here in The Hague agreed that any use of chemical weapons is deplorable and unacceptable. So can we really allow to reverse the success of the Convention? Will we allow the vision of a world free of chemical weapons to be ruined?

So far, chemical weapons attacks in Syria have largely been committed with impunity. The repeated use of veto power in the United Nations Security Council to prevent moves towards accountability is highly regrettable. That is why our political statements need to be translated into concrete, substantial decisions. The proposals on enhancing verification regime and attribution mechanism are of utmost importance for the appropriate implementation and credibility of the Convention. Poland firmly backs the proposed draft decision submitted by United Kingdom and appeals to all States Parties to support and adopt this decision.

We all agree that the effective attribution mechanism plays a critical role in combating the re-emergence of chemical weapons. Poland shares determination of many countries that we have to stay united on this matter and act where we can. It must be clearly said that no State tolerates the use of chemical weapons-anywhere, by anyone and under any circumstances-and no one goes unpunished after using chemical weapons that harm people.

More than a century ago the international community was able to agree on the total prohibition of chemical weapons. It is the absolute responsibility of the States Parties today to renew and sustain commitment toward this goal.

I would like once again to assure you of Poland's willingness to cooperate closely on this matter not only within the OPCW, but also on all other pertinent international fora.