



UK Delegation to the OPCW

***Statement to the 108th Session of the Executive Council
of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical
Weapons***

***by Her Excellency Joanna Roper, Permanent
Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain
and Northern Ireland***

Mr Chairperson, Director General, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

Let me start by extending my thanks to His Excellency, Director General Fernando Arias, for his comprehensive report demonstrating the significant and increasing demands on this organisation and the progress he has made. I would also like to thank His Excellency, Ambassador Terán Parral for chairing this session and for his excellent leadership of the Executive Council since May 2023.

Mr Chairperson,

At long last, with the collapse of the Assad regime, Syria is now in a position to take a fresh approach to its engagement with the OPCW and finally close the file on the chemical weapons programme. This is an opportunity that few could have imagined 12 months ago.

We welcome commitments made by Syria's Interim Authorities to cooperate with the Technical Secretariat and international community to this end. We warmly welcome the DG's report of his recent visit and note on the way forward. We look ahead to the rapid deployment of OPCW technical teams on the ground to help Syria deliver a full, complete and accurate declaration; and to start destruction. And I would like to thank the Permanent Representative of Qatar for representing Syria's interests at the OPCW since December so effectively.

After more than a decade, we are urging Syria to turn the page on the horrific legacy of Assad's chemical weapons programme and we must support it to do so. We call on States Parties to support the Technical Secretariat and the Syrian Arab Republic to complete the job of destroying the Assad Regime's chemical weapons. The UK has recently announced additional funding for the OPCW's Syria Missions - we have given a total of more than £1m to the OPCW's Syria Trust Fund over the past year. And yesterday, Mr Chairperson, I sent

a letter to the Director General, confirming that we will provide a comprehensive offer of practical support to him and his team later this month.

Mr Chairperson,

I wish that I could reflect positive progress on other states of concern. Russia continues to undermine the Chemical Weapons Convention. It is now three years since Russia started a war of aggression against Ukraine - a brutal attack on the sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity of a democratic state. As my Prime Minister said last week: "For three years we have been united in opposition to Russia's barbaric invasion. And for three years we have been full of admiration for the incredible response of the Ukrainian people."

Let there be no doubt, UK support to Ukraine will remain steadfast.

Russia continues to use chemical weapons in Ukraine. We note the conclusions of the Technical Secretariat's most recent Technical Assistance Visit report issued on 14 February. This report confirmed the presence of CS gas in samples taken from three separate incidents in Ukraine, establishing a pattern of violations of the CWC across a wide geographic area. There must now be attribution for such attacks, and the perpetrators must be held to account.

We must not forget Russia has form in regularly violating international law concerning chemical weapons. Seven years ago today, on 4 March 2018, Russia deployed Novichok nerve agent on the streets of the United Kingdom. This attack resulted in the tragic death of Dawn Sturgess. Russia also used Novichok to poison Alexei Navalny in Russia in 2020.

Mr Chairperson,

Russia has set a damaging example. We must defend the fundamental principles of the Chemical Weapons Convention. We are extremely concerned by reports which suggest that the Sudanese Armed Forces have used chemical weapons in Sudan. Sudan, like any other State Party to the Chemical Weapons Convention, must abide by its obligations.

Mr Chairperson,

We also welcome the Technical Secretariat's response to the opportunities and risks of emerging technology. The excellent Morocco AI Conference in October, and the AI Research Challenge, co-funded by the UK, provide a sound foundation for our collective efforts to capture the benefits of new technologies, and to understand the security risks they will pose.

Mr Chairperson,

The Director General is critical to the success of this organisation. This body has important work to do over the coming months to find a worthy successor to Director General Arias. As the British say, they will have big shoes to fill.

Events in Syria and continuing Russian breaches demonstrate that the OPCW remains central to international security. This Council must provide its unwavering support for every aspect of the OPCW's work at this critical juncture.