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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

**STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR ROBERT P. MIKULAK
UNITED STATES DELEGATION
TO THE SEVENTY-THIRD SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE SESSION**

At the opening of this Seventy-Third Session of the Executive Council, Mr Chairman, I would like to wish you a warm welcome to the Chair, and to assure you of the full support of my delegation. We look forward to your leadership of the Council over the coming year.

Before beginning my detailed remarks I would also like to welcome Somalia as the 189th State Party to the Convention. We urge the Technical Secretariat and States Parties to continue and intensify efforts to bring Myanmar, South Sudan, and Angola into the Convention this year.

Mr Chairman, Mr Director-General, distinguished delegates,

Looking at the original agenda, this session of the Council seemed routine. But it is not routine, and must not be. For the Executive Council, and indeed the OPCW, to maintain their relevance and credibility, they must face the most serious challenge in the history of the Organisation—the reported use of chemical weapons in Syria.

On 13 June, the White House issued a statement on the United States assessment that the Assad regime has used chemical weapons, including the nerve agent sarin, on a small scale against the opposition multiple times over the last year. Multiple, independent streams of information reveal that this use occurred on at least four occasions between March and May of this year. The body of information used to make this assessment includes reporting regarding Syrian officials planning and executing regime chemical weapons attacks; reporting that includes descriptions of the time, location, and means of attacks; and descriptions of physiological symptoms that are consistent with exposure to chemical weapons agents. The assessment is further supported by laboratory analysis of physiological samples obtained from a number of individuals, which revealed exposure to sarin.

President Obama has been clear that the use of chemical weapons—or the transfer of chemical weapons to terrorist groups—is unacceptable to the United States, as there has long been an established norm within the international community against the use of chemical weapons. No one understands this norm better than the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention and the members of this Council. The Convention is dedicated to excluding completely the possibility of the use of chemical weapons, yet we estimate that 100 to 150 people have died from detected chemical weapons attacks in Syria to date; however, casualty data is likely incomplete. Although lethal chemical weapons attacks make



up only a small portion of the catastrophic loss of life in Syria, which now stands at more than 90,000 deaths, the use of chemical weapons violates international norms that have existed in the international community for decades.

States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention should continue to condemn any use of chemical weapons in Syria and also call on all parties to the conflict to allow unfettered access to the United Nations investigating team to conduct on-site investigations to help reveal the truth about chemical weapons use in Syria. By allowing unfettered access, the Assad regime could prove that its request for a United Nations investigation was not just a diversionary tactic. Until that occurs, States Parties should continue to make their voices heard on behalf of everyone affected by the use of chemical weapons in Syria. On 14 June, the United States provided a letter to United Nations Secretary-General Ban, calling the United Nations' attention to our updated intelligence assessment and specific incidents of alleged chemical weapons use. We also requested that the United Nations mission include these incidents in its ongoing investigation and report, as appropriate, on its findings.

In addition to providing unfettered access to the United Nations investigating team, the Syrian Government should accede to the Chemical Weapons Convention without delay so that Syrian chemical weapons can be destroyed under international verification. In the interim, the Syrian Government should assure the international community that its chemical weapons stocks are secure and not at risk for use, transfer, or acquisition by a non-State actor, as any and all of these risks could have devastating effects on Syria's border nations and the entire region. The threat of use or the actual use of chemical weapons by anyone is a threat to us all.

The United States is not alone in these beliefs. A few weeks ago, the G8 Leaders Communiqué made clear the collective agreement of eight nations to condemn any use of chemical weapons in Syria, to allow access to the United Nations investigating team, to have those that are responsible for chemical weapons use held accountable, and to emphasise the need for secure and safe storage of all chemical weapons in Syria pending destruction under international verification. The Chair of the 2013 Australia Group Plenary made similar requests, reflecting the views of the 41 members of the Group.

The fact that the use of chemical weapons in Syria is not an issue on the agenda of this Executive Council session, despite the grave concerns previously expressed by both the Executive Council and the Third Review Conference, reflects very poorly on both the Executive Council and the OPCW as a whole. This is the Organisation that was established by States that were determined to prevent any further use of chemical weapons. We should be discussing the reports of chemical weapons use. The future relevance and credibility of the OPCW and the Chemical Weapons Convention are at risk.

Some argue that nothing new has happened since the Council discussed the use of chemical weapons in Syria in late March. This argument does not reflect reality. In mid-April, the Third Review Conference emphasised its deep concern that chemical weapons may have been used in Syria. And since then four countries—the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and Russia—have each stated publicly their conclusion that use of nerve agents has taken place. Each country has based its conclusion in part on analysis of samples. Surely, the statement by the Review Conference and the public statements by major countries, who are also States Parties to the Convention, qualify as important developments.

Some may say that so-called “political issues” should be left to the United Nations Security Council and that the policy-making organs of the OPCW, such as the Executive Council, are only mandated to deal with technical issues. Some may argue that events on the territory of a non-State Party are not the business of the Council. We fundamentally disagree that the Council is restricted solely to technical matters. Any reported use of chemical weapons anywhere is relevant to the object and purpose of the Chemical Weapons Convention and therefore relevant to the work of the policy-making organs of the OPCW.

This Seventy-Third Session of the Executive Council should not be an idle bystander, but instead should echo all of the concerns expressed to date about the use of chemical weapons in Syria.

An important issue on the agenda is following up on the findings we Member States made during the Third Review Conference in April, which established a roadmap for the Organisation for the next five years. It is essential that the results of the Review Conference not be left on a shelf gathering dust for the next five years. We welcome the matrix that has been prepared by the Technical Secretariat to summarise the action items from the Review Conference report. This will be very useful background for the follow-up process. We look forward to the Technical Secretariat’s presentation of its analysis and to discussion of the report during our plenary session.

The matrix highlights many important action items, some ongoing, some new. The simple fact that work is continuing, however, does not mean that no changes are needed. The Review Conference called for the States Parties to intensify work in a number of areas. These include better preparedness for alleged use and helping one another in emergency situations under Article X, innovative outreach under Article VII, and closer cooperation between States Parties under Article XI. Among the new items are the need for the OPCW to be a global repository for information and expertise in chemical disarmament, and the necessity for developing a policy for retention and disposal of classified information. Part of the follow-up, of course, will come during the discussion of the proposed 2014 Programme and Budget. The United States will examine the Programme closely, to ensure it reflects the objectives and activities laid out in the Review Conference’s final report.

With respect to the role of the OPCW as a global repository on chemical disarmament, we welcome the informal Technical Secretariat concept paper that has recently been circulated. We look forward to hearing more from the Technical Secretariat this week about how to make the goal a reality.

Regarding the level of the 2014 Budget, the United States believes that the basis for discussion, the so-called baseline, should be the budget level for 2013, minus the substantial non-recurring costs of the Review Conference. Given the difficult financial situation that continues to face many States Parties, 2014 will need to be another year of austerity. We will be carefully examining the effectiveness of existing activities to look for efficiencies and possible reductions, and we will scrutinise with particular care each proposal for new activities or increased expenditure. Overall, we believe that the final budget level for 2014 should be significantly below the 2013 level.

One agenda item that is always important deals with the possessor States’ ongoing chemical weapons destruction efforts. I am pleased to report that the United States remains on track in preparing two new demilitarisation facilities so that we can meet our planned completion

date. In May, a large Executive Council delegation visited the two sites at Pueblo, Colorado, and Blue Grass, Kentucky, to see for themselves the progress being made and our commitment and dedication to meet the planned completion date. We encourage all delegations to read the OPCW official visitors' report on the visit to the United States, which is now available.

One other chemical weapons issue that we must not overlook is the mystery of the origin of the munitions that were discovered in Libya in the fall of 2011. As the United States strives to assist Libya to destroy these items by the end of the year, we remain concerned about where they were produced. I recall the Director-General's note verbale of 19 December 2012, in which he requested States Parties to provide any information they might have on the question of their origin.

Mr Chairman,

In closing, I would like to request that the full text of this statement be circulated as an official document of the Seventy-Third Session of the Council. Thank you, Mr Chairman.

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