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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

**STATEMENT BY ROBERT P. MIKULAK
UNITED STATES DELEGATION**

AT THE SEVENTY-FOURTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

At the opening of this Seventy-Fourth Session of the Executive Council, Madam Chairperson, I would like to assure you of the continued support of my delegation to the chair and to the OPCW. We look forward to your leadership of the Council as we manoeuvre through these challenging times.

Madam Chairperson, Mr Director-General, distinguished delegates,

In the last few days, I think we all experienced a pivotal moment on Syria. The world faced the terrible reality of a chemical weapons attack that killed more than 1,000 Syrians. The international community was seized with the need to respond to the largest chemical weapons attack in a quarter of a century. And the world did respond—first, through the leadership of the United States and the Russian Federation in crafting a framework that outlined a path toward the total elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme. And then resoundingly with the unanimous adoption of an Executive Council decision and a Security Council resolution, implementing and reinforcing the negotiated framework.

One month ago, this outcome seemed utterly unimaginable. One month ago, the Syrian regime had not even acknowledged the existence of its chemical weapons stockpiles. The OPCW was facing with a significant challenge—how to apply its mandate to eliminate chemical weapons in a State wracked by civil war—one in which chemical weapons had become a crucial implement of war for one side. There were numerous hurdles along the way to this agreement, and more may arise in trying to effectively implement it. However, the entire Council agreed that this extraordinary situation requires extraordinary measures, and the Council will need to ensure that the decision is fully implemented. Just a few hours after the Council's action, the United Nations Security Council endorsed and reinforced our Council decision in Resolution 2118, which reflects global recognition of the issue's unique importance. Much work remains for the Organisation, in coordination with the United Nations, to ensure the elimination of Syria's stockpiles and all related facilities is executed quickly and in accordance with the Convention, the Executive Council decision and Resolution 2118. And many actions must rapidly be taken by the Assad regime.

The Technical Secretariat has moved energetically to implement the Council's decision. We are impressed with the professionalism and commitment demonstrated by the staff of the Secretariat, many times in situations that pose considerable personal risk. I simply want to say "thank you" to them.



The United States stands ready to assist the OPCW in this demanding task. In fact, the United States has already contributed USD 2 million. We urge other States Parties that can help to coordinate contributions and assistance closely with the OPCW and the United Nations, including immediately depositing in the OPCW's Trust Fund those funds that have already been pledged. We also expect the OPCW and the United Nations to have other needs—for equipment and for expert personnel. We urge States Parties to move expeditiously to respond to the needs of both international organisations, as they are identified.

This ambitious yet essential undertaking to rid Syria of chemical weapons will of necessity affect other activities of the Organisation. We cannot continue with “business as usual.” Activities planned for 2013 and 2014 may have to be delayed or set aside. While planning is under way for executing the verification and the destruction of the Assad regime's chemical weapons and related facilities, we call on the Secretariat to re-assess the draft 2014 Programme and Budget and determine which activities must be retained and which activities can be delayed or cancelled. Critical verification and inspection activities must of course continue, but other less time-sensitive activities may need to be postponed. Such re-prioritisation is not a value judgment regarding the importance of one activity over another. It is simply a reflection that this is not “business as usual,” for the Secretariat or for States Parties to the Convention. Once the Secretariat has more clarity regarding necessary verification activities, it will be in a position to release a revised 2014 Programme and Budget for the Executive Council's consideration in advance of the next session of the Conference of the States Parties.

The “Matrix of Actionable Items Identified at the Third Review Conference” noted during the Seventy-Third Session of the Council is an important tool to ensure that we follow up on the findings of the Third Review Conference. The important work of the Third Review Conference must not be relegated to a place on a shelf. We welcome the reports of Vice-Chairpersons and/or facilitators during our plenary session on progress made in dealing with the actionable items.

This week the Executive Council will again consider the status of 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, in Pueblo, Colorado and Blue Grass, Kentucky, and that these new facilities will enable us to meet our planned completion date. The United States will provide a detailed presentation of the progress achieved since the last Executive Council session later today.

Although we are focusing on addressing the challenges faced by the Organisation for its work in Syria, we must remember that other pressing issues remain to be resolved. The United States continues to await additional information regarding the origin of the munitions that were discovered in Libya in the fall of 2011. We are all encouraged with Libya's progress in destroying its stockpiles. We cannot, however, view this issue as resolved without understanding where the additional weapons and agent were produced, so that we can be sure that no more can be made. I recall and would like to reiterate the Director-General's note verbale of 19 December 2012, in which he requested that States Parties provide the Organisation any information they might have regarding the origin of these munitions, and noted that he eagerly awaits new information to shed light on this question.

Over the years I've learned that one key for more effective communication is to close any speech on a high note. Unfortunately, we often find that to be a difficult task in dealing with our work here at the OPCW. Issues related to chemical weapons don't tend to have many high notes. This time, however, I am pleased to be able to close positively, since our agenda for this session of the Executive Council also includes consideration of the re-appointment of the Director-General, Ambassador Ahmet Üzümcü, for an additional term of four years. The Director-General has ably presided over some difficult issues during his tenure, and the Organisation has successfully met every challenge. My delegation wholeheartedly supports the renewal of Director-General Üzümcü's appointment. We look forward to four more years of his leadership in helping to guide the Organisation through the challenges that will surely come.

Madam Chairperson,

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

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.

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