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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR ROBERT P. MIKULAK
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE
OPCW AT THE SEVENTY-EIGHTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairman,

Since September of 2013, the resolve of the OPCW and its Member States in living up to the responsibility of ridding the world of the menace of chemical weapons has been put to the test. In my delegation's view, the Organisation and its members have made significant, but somewhat uneven, progress in confronting existing and emerging challenges. It is our collective responsibility to continuously take stock of our performance, and to anticipate future challenges and ensure our capacity to address them. Our work is too important for half measures, process over substance, or complacency with lowest-common-denominator outcomes. Membership in the Executive Council brings not only rights, but responsibilities.

At the Forty-Eighth Meeting of the Executive Council, this body spoke with a near unanimous voice in expressing serious concern about the confirmed use of chemical weapons in Syria. My delegation, like many others, regrets that this very important decision regarding the confirmed use of chemical weapons was not adopted by consensus. But make no mistake: the Council made every reasonable effort to reach consensus. And we certainly hope that future decisions can be taken by consensus. But we will not rule out voting, if it again should prove necessary.

Your leadership in guiding the work during the Forty-Eighth Meeting of the Executive Council, Mr Chairman, is commendable and very much appreciated. It contributed to an outcome that upheld the credibility of the Organisation and captured the position of the vast majority of the Member States represented here. Since this is the last regular Executive Council session over which you will be presiding, let me express my appreciation and that of my delegation. I want to thank you for your patience and able leadership of all our proceedings during your chairmanship of the Council which extended over many meetings and sessions, which will no doubt extend to this session as well.

Later during this session the Council will elect a new Chairman. Anticipating that this Council will endorse the WEOG's nominee for the position, let me wish my friend Ambassador Francesco Azzarello every possible success and to extend to him the assurances of my delegation's full cooperation.



Since September 2013, the issue of the elimination of Syria's chemical weapons programme has rightfully been the focus of the Council's attention. Working together, the international community has come a long way in advancing the verified elimination of the strategic threat posed by Syrian chemical weapons; however, this Executive Council still has much to do.

The United States appreciates the report by the Director-General that progress has been made in the elimination of Syria's declared chemical weapons programme, notably the verified destruction of two Syrian chemical weapons production facilities. The United States of America also takes note of the estimate that five underground chemical weapons production facilities should be destroyed before 30 June 2015. We also note that the destruction of the aircraft hangars, at least those that remain accessible, should be accomplished shortly after 30 June 2015. But recognising that the verified elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons production facilities is way behind schedule, the United States of America urges Syria to complete destruction of these facilities as rapidly as possible. Despite considerable progress in eliminating Syria's chemical weapons programme, serious issues still remain, and Syria cannot be treated as just another State Party. The people of Syria still face the very real threat of chemical weapons use by the Syrian Government, necessitating continued diligence and scrutiny from the OPCW.

The United States thanks the Director-General and all members of both the Fact-Finding Mission and the Declaration Assessment Team for their service, courage and commitment to their missions. The trilogy of reports by the Fact-Finding Mission makes crystal clear "with a high degree of confidence that chlorine has been used as a weapon." These three reports are now officially in the hands of the United Nations Security Council, and the decision by this Council on 4 February also makes crystal clear that this Council will not tolerate the use of chemical weapons anywhere, at any time, by anyone under any circumstances and that those individuals responsible should be held accountable. The United States of America welcomes the additional information provided by the Director-General on the status of the Fact-Finding Mission. The United States firmly believes that all credible allegations of chemical weapons use should be investigated. To this end, the United States believes that the Fact-Finding Mission must remain intact, functional and operationally ready to conduct future missions in Syria.

The Declaration and Assessment Team recently completed its seventh mission to Syria with the conclusion of the trip from 25 January to 5 February 2015. Notably, the second Status Report of the Activities of the Declaration Assessment Team makes clear that serious issues remain unresolved, resulting in serious concerns about Syria's compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention. In this regard, the United States of America fully supports the on-going work of the OPCW's Declaration and Assessment team and looks forward to hearing from them in the closed session. This Council must ensure that Syria renounces the use of chemical weapons, accurately declares its entire chemical weapons programme, and fully complies with the Chemical Weapons Convention, the decisions of this Council and United Nations Security Council resolution 2118 (2013).

My delegation is mindful that other issues require close attention by the Council, as well. One of the most important is the completion of the destruction of chemical weapons by possessor States. The United States remains committed to destruction of its chemical weapons in the shortest time possible and continues to stay on track to meet its planned completion date. My delegation will provide a briefing on our progress under the appropriate

agenda item, and we look forward to welcoming representatives of the Council to our destruction facility in Pueblo, Colorado, later this month, in fact, next week.

My delegation recognises that other States – Iraq, Libya, and Russia - face difficult challenges in meeting their commitments regarding destruction of chemical weapons. We commend their efforts to address these challenges.

I also want to stress the need to devote particular attention to important commitments in two other areas covered by the Convention – national implementation and international cooperation. Unfortunately, the state of affairs is not satisfactory in either area. Progress by States Parties in meeting their national implementation obligations under Article VII is exceedingly slow and disappointing. Discussions about how best to proceed on Article XI have become ritualistic and unproductive. In both areas, repeating the same discussion will yield the same result – which means in fact little, if any, result. We are ready to engage in a cooperative effort with other delegations to break out of the rut and to look at things in different, more creative and productive ways. And I would note that we were encouraged by the recent positive discussions during the Article XI consultations. We call on others to join us in looking for more productive approaches.

Yet another area where discussions have languished relates to the risk of the development of so-called incapacitating chemicals as weapons, purportedly for law enforcement purposes. We welcome the renewed leadership of the Australian and Swiss delegations to informally engage delegations on this issue. In this regard, let me re-state once again that the US is not developing, producing, stockpiling or using incapacitating chemical agents nor are we using riot control agents as a method of warfare. We equally encourage all OPCW Member States to follow the example of a number of delegations, and we have heard several statements here today, and to confirm in an official statement to the Council that they are not using, developing or stockpiling incapacitating chemical weapons for any purpose.

Achieving the OPCW's core objective of strengthening international security in a world of rapid change is possible if we all work together. We must conceptualise and develop a framework to make sure that the OPCW remains current, relevant and effective as the world's pre-eminent watchdog on all issues relating to chemical weapons. Further, we must ensure that the Organisation, and particularly the Director-General and the Technical Secretariat, has the tools they need to adapt to the new challenges that ensuring security against chemical weapons may pose in the future. For these reasons, we appreciate the Note by the Technical Secretariat on "The OPCW in 2025: Ensuring a World Free of Chemical Weapons." We look forward to discussing the future of the OPCW in informal settings with colleagues, and our hope is that before preparations begin for the Fourth Review Conference there already will be an emerging consensus on what the OPCW of the future should look like.

The experience of the last eighteen months has demonstrated the importance of ensuring that the Technical Secretariat possesses technical expertise in depth and the capacity to deploy that expertise on short notice, if necessary. This is particularly important when it comes to allegations of the use of chemical weapons. In such a situation the OPCW cannot be a passive observer, and to deter use, it is crucial that delegations support the responsibility of the Director-General to investigate use promptly when circumstances demand and allow it.

My delegation believes that the Technical Secretariat should intensify its effort to ensure a standing capacity for contingency response to allegations of use of chemical weapons, in order to provide assistance and to determine the facts. This effort should include the further strengthening of cooperation between the OPCW and relevant international health, law-enforcement, and other specialised organisations. Such efforts could extend to the alleged use of chemical weapons by non-state actors under appropriate circumstances. Issues related to the use of chemical weapons by non-state actors are also very relevant, as we heard yesterday, to the work of the Open-Ended Working Group on Terrorism, which could guide and further reinforce these efforts.

Finally, an aspect of the reality of combating use and preventing re-emergence of chemical weapons lies in acknowledging there are many stakeholders in any lasting disarmament effort. While the OPCW will certainly take the overall lead, other stakeholders can play key roles in their areas of interest and expertise, like chemical safety and security, ethics as applied to chemistry and weapons of mass destruction, education, or technological and industrial developments. Complementing its core objectives, the OPCW is in a unique position to serve as a platform where government, academia, industry and civil society come together to discuss and devise solutions to challenges ahead related to the Chemical Weapons Convention. We commend the initiatives already underway and look forward to broadening efforts in this direction.

Leadership is at the heart of success in the transformation of the OPCW from an organisation mostly verifying destruction and inspecting industry, to one equipped to more actively prevent the re-emergence of chemical weapons and deal with the security challenges of the future. I'm not only speaking of the leadership of the Director-General, which we very much appreciate, and the Technical Secretariat in embracing change, prudently and in a measured way. I also mean the leadership of this Council as a policy-making body of the OPCW, with the courage to put our shared goal of ridding the world of chemical weapons above any short-term political consideration. As we start a new Executive Council regular session, let us recommit ourselves to substance over process in building, today, the OPCW of tomorrow.

In closing, I request that the full text of this statement be considered as an official document of the Seventy-Eighth Session of the Executive Council. I also request that it be posted on the public website and on the external server.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.

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