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NETHERLANDS

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR JAN-LUCAS VAN HOORN
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE NETHERLANDS TO THE OPCW AT THE
SEVENTY-EIGHTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairman,

The Netherlands aligns itself with the statement pronounced by the Permanent Representative of Latvia on behalf of the European Union.

My delegation thanks the Director-General for his opening statement and the Vice-Chairmen for their reports.

Among the issues on the agenda for this session, there are a few that I should like to highlight.

Firstly, regarding the situation in Syria. The Netherlands welcomes the progress in the elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme. The destruction of the declared priority chemicals and the effluent of the hydrolysis is nearing completion.

We also welcome the long overdue start of the actual destruction of the chemical weapons production facilities. This process should now be pursued with vigour and finalised without any further delay.

The third report of the Declaration Assessment Team shows that there is still an extensive list of issues to be resolved around the Syrian initial declaration. We express the hope that the supplement to the declaration, which according to the DAT-report will consist of no less than seven parts, will be issued soon. As we have stated on previous occasions, it is the responsibility and the obligation of the Syrian Arab Republic to remove any doubts surrounding the correctness and completeness of its declaration.

We thank the Director-General and the Technical Secretariat for the way they are keeping delegations informed about developments.

There is no reason for complacency. On the contrary, the situation in Syria remains a source of grave concern. The adoption by this Council on 4 February of decision EC-M-48/DEC.1 and the adoption by the United Nations Security Council of its resolution 2209 (2015) ten days ago, are stark reminders of the fact that the removal and destruction of the declared chemicals has not brought an end to the use of chemical weapons in Syria. The Netherlands stresses that the persons responsible for these criminal acts must be held accountable.



My delegation reiterates the importance it attaches to continued close monitoring of the situation in Syria by the Council, including through regular Council meetings, the next preferably in May.

The second issue I want to broach is the future of the Organisation. This is a subject that has received attention in the past, in particular during the preparations for the Third Review Conference in 2013 and rightly so. Over the last year and a half the debate lost momentum, understandably, as a result of the attention the situation in Syria has demanded of all of us.

The 2011 report of the Advisory Panel on Future OPCW Priorities was considered by my and many other delegations as a valuable contribution to the discussion. The attention given to the report and the important recommendations it contained, however, has been disappointing.

In this light, the Netherlands warmly welcomes the note issued by the Technical Secretariat on 6 March entitled: “The OPCW in 2025: Ensuring a World Free of Chemical Weapons” (S/1252/2015).

The paper rightly emphasises that the Organisation needs to adapt to the changing environment it operates in to stay relevant, something also mentioned by ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands when addressing both the Third Review Conference and the Conference of the States Parties. The moment that all remaining declared stockpiles will have been destroyed is approaching, slowly, but surely. Universality in membership has come nearer, with now only six (and very soon only five) states outside the Convention.

Keeping the world permanently free of chemical weapons is a continuous challenge. New threats like terrorism and new developments in science and technology demand our attention. The OPCW does not operate in isolation, but in a fast-changing international environment. It is therefore paramount that the OPCW should stay in touch with its surroundings. Ideas such as intensifying engagement with industry, civil society and academia have the support of this delegation. But this is only one aspect: other issues, including ways to improve our efforts in the fields of assistance and protection and international cooperation equally deserve our attention and consideration.

It is our sincere hope that the vision paper gives renewed impetus to the debate on these and other issues. My delegation stands ready to engage in that discussion with the Technical Secretariat and other interested delegations.

Mr Chairman,

As this is the last regular session of this Council under your chairmanship, I take the opportunity to pay tribute to the manner in which you have guided us, at sometimes difficult times. Your diplomatic and personal skills have guaranteed the success of our efforts. We thank you wholeheartedly for that.

In closing, I request that this statement be issued as an official document of this Seventy-Eighth Session of the Executive Council and be published on the OPCW website and extranet.

Thank you.