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**FRANCE**

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR MR LAURENT PIC  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF FRANCE TO THE OPCW AT THE  
SEVENTY-EIGHTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairperson,

I of course endorse the statement made by my colleague, Ambassador Māris Klišāns of Latvia, on behalf of the European Union.

In a few days, at Ieper, our Organisation will mark the sad anniversary of the first use of chemical weapons. This commemoration, which is a reminder of so much suffering, is a duty that we have towards present and future generations: Never again!

This goes to the very essence and success of our Organisation. In just a few years, the Organisation has advanced the implementation of the ban on chemical weapons. At a time when the prospect of the completion of destruction activities is within sight, the time has come to think about its future.

Such is the purpose of the Note issued recently by the Technical Secretariat. We support this initiative, which serves as a useful and constructive basis for this discussion. For France, the fight against proliferation must become our Organisation's top priority. This presupposes the preservation of the capacity for verification, of acquired expertise, and of lessons learned. Maintaining this capacity requires concrete measures within the Technical Secretariat right now, both in terms of organisation and in terms of human resources management, and we are confident that the Director-General will implement them. This will make it possible to prevent the re-emergence of chemical weapons.

Maintaining this capacity is necessary for the Technical Secretariat to be able to broaden its scope of activities, based on its recognised expertise, and to develop its relationships with key players, from the chemical industry and chemical industry professionals to the academic world. This work will be meaningful only if the universality of the Convention is ensured. In this regard, the progress towards Burma's upcoming accession should be praised. We call on the remaining States that have not yet done so to sign and ratify the Convention. Finally, the future of our Organisation also includes, within its mandate, active participation in the fight against terrorism.

France recognises the importance of effective national implementation of the Convention. Within the framework of Article VII, we will ensure that, in close cooperation with the Technical Secretariat and with the support of all States Parties, this implementation is carried



out with the necessary rigour and diligence, taking account of the difficulties encountered, by better linking the needs of certain States Parties with the assistance that the Technical Secretariat can offer to them, and with the support that can be provided by States Parties that already have fully operational regulatory regimes. Furthermore, Article VII is the natural framework in which the Organisation can play a role in the fight against terrorism. The Director-General's Note reviewing the OPCW's contribution in this regard received our full attention. The discussion of this sensitive and important issue got off to a promising start at the meeting of the Open-Ended Working Group on Terrorism.

All of these objectives are highly relevant to the life of our Organisation.

However, right now, the Syrian dossier and its various aspects still constitute the greatest challenge that we must face today. It justifies the intense work that this Council has undertaken since the Syrian Arab Republic joined the OPCW. It has put a real strain on the capacities of the Organisation and its staff, who have responded with professionalism and determination. France wishes to pay tribute to all of the staff members of the Organisation, to those who have travelled to the Syrian Arab Republic in spite of the dangers, and to those who have supported them in this enterprise.

But what exactly is the enterprise? It involves completely and definitively dismantling the chemical weapons programme of a State—the Syrian Arab Republic—that, after having used chemical weapons against its people, joined our Organisation under pressure from the international community. Today, all of the declared weapons have been removed from Syrian territory and, to a large extent, have been destroyed along with their effluents. This is a cause for satisfaction.

Even so, the Syrian dossier is not closed. And how could it be, with reports of chlorine gas attacks throughout 2014, and with new allegations, just this morning, that continue to alarm us? How under such circumstances can we consider that the Syrian Arab Republic has been respecting the Convention and fulfilling its obligations, when its own people continue to suffer the terror of chemical weapons and death?

At its Forty-Eighth Meeting, this Council assumed its responsibilities by adopting a decision that condemned the use of chlorine gas in the Syrian Arab Republic. This allowed our Organisation to live up to its mission. That decision, which sent a message of unity, led to the adoption of resolution 2209 (2015) by the United Nations Security Council on 6 March.

These decisions would not have been possible without the work undertaken by the Fact-Finding Mission, whose members carried out investigations and analyses and conducted interviews with witnesses, victims, and those who treated the victims, in a way suited to the Syrian context and, in particular, to the prevailing security conditions. The attempts to undermine this Mission specifically fail to address this particular situation, and change nothing about the fact that all of the evidence gathered constitutes evidence supporting the conclusion that chlorine was in fact used in three villages in the north of the Syrian Arab Republic. The Mission's mandate does not include the identification of the perpetrators, but the Mission's reports leave no doubt as to the Syrian Government's responsibility. Faced with this violation of the Convention, can we sit back and be satisfied with the reassurances that the Syrian Arab Republic is extending good cooperation? As the decision of this Council and resolution 2209 (2015) commit us, the perpetrators of these violations must be held to account.

The Executive Council's decision of 4 February gave a clear mandate to the Fact-Finding Mission to continue its inquiries into all of the allegations of use of chemical weapons. France supports the Director-General's determination to continue this Mission. The Director-General wrote to the Syrian Government requesting it to permit and facilitate the continuation of this inquiry. There is still no sign of a response from the Syrian Arab Republic; unfortunately, this is not surprising. If the Syrian Government is genuinely acting in good faith, it must authorise immediate and unfettered access to the sites of alleged use.

Verification of the Syrian initial declaration is another subject of great concern. The unanswered questions about the numerous inconsistencies identified by the Technical Secretariat, and the absence of evidence attesting to the loss, destruction, or consumption of certain agents, raise questions about the quantities of ricin, mustard, and DF likely to remain on Syrian territory. The same can be said of the 2,000 chemical bombs that were declared as having been converted, of the surprising lack of documentation, and of the link between the Scientific Studies and Research Centre and the Syrian chemical programme. Full light must absolutely be shed on these grey areas, lest we accept the possibility of the re-emergence of the Syrian chemical programme at a later stage.

The Syrian Government's prevarications call for vigilance. The Syrian authorities must stop their obstruction and cooperate fully with the Technical Secretariat, in a manner that is completely transparent. As long as doubt remains, the mission to verify the initial declaration must continue, for even the smallest of doubts is an enormous threat to the future.

The Syrian dossier has required an unprecedented financial effort from our Organisation and numerous States Parties. However, the financial responsibility for the destruction of chemical weapons and facilities and for the missions carried out by OPCW staff falls with the Syrian Arab Republic. On 10 February 2014, the European Union authorised the use of frozen assets to cover the costs of the verification and destruction associated with the elimination of the Syrian chemical programme. Unfortunately, my delegation has no choice but to recall this fact time and time again, since the Syrian authorities persistently refuse to meet their responsibilities under the Convention. It is time for the Syrian Arab Republic to fulfil all of its obligations towards our Organisation, without exception. For its part, the European Union, which is making considerable efforts of solidarity in support of the many Syrians who have fled the violence of their government, does not need to take any lessons.

I should like to praise to the work of the Deputy Director-General and look forward to welcoming Ambassador Rao to The Hague. I should also like to congratulate you, Mr Chairperson, for your work in leading this Council.

I thank you and would ask that this statement be considered as an official document of the Seventy-Eighth Session of the Executive Council, and that it be published on the official website which, as noted by the delegate from China, must reflect the linguistic diversity that prevails within our Organisation.

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