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**LUXEMBOURG STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE EUROPEAN UNION
DELIVERED BY H.E. AMBASSADOR PIERRE-LOUIS LORENZ
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF LUXEMBOURG TO THE OPCW AT THE
SEVENTY-NINTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairperson,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union.

The Candidate Countries Turkey, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, and Albania, the country of the Stabilisation and Association Process, and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the EFTA countries Iceland and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia align themselves with this statement. Andorra, Monaco and San Marino also associate themselves with this statement.

Since this is the first time I take the floor in the capacity of Representative of the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, I wish to congratulate you for taking over the Chairmanship of the Executive Council and express our trust in your leadership and experience. Let me assure you and the Vice-Chairs of our continuous support in your endeavours aiming at the successful outcome of the Executive Council's activities.

I seize this opportunity to express our deep appreciation to the outgoing Deputy Director-General H.E. Ambassador Grace Asirwatham for her valuable contribution to the work and the efficient functioning of this Organisation.

I would like to thank the Director-General for his comprehensive statement, which as always provides useful guidance for our work. This gives me the opportunity to reiterate our appreciation to him and to the OPCW staff for their commitment to the work of the Organisation and their efforts with regard to the ongoing Syrian chemical weapons operation in particular. We are looking forward to participating actively in the deliberations during this week.

It is regrettable that despite the considerable progress achieved regarding the destruction of the declared Syrian chemical weapons and production facilities, we are still facing too many uncertainties to have confidence that the dismantling of the Syrian chemical weapons programme is irreversible. In this respect, we condemn the continuous use of chlorine as a weapon by the regime against innocent civilians. We are also deeply concerned regarding gaps and contradictions contained in the Syrian chemical weapons declarations.



We are looking forward to hearing the report of the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM). The EU is concerned that chlorine has been used repeatedly as a weapon since last March in the Idlib province and that, as in previous cases, chlorine or other chemicals have been dropped from helicopters, an asset that only the Syrian Government possesses.

On the use of chlorine as a weapon, the EU supported the Executive Council decision at its Forty-Eighth Meeting and the United Nations Security Council resolution 2209 (2015) condemning the use of chlorine as a chemical weapon in the Syrian Arab Republic. The resolution makes clear that the use of chlorine as a weapon is a violation of both resolution 2118 (2013) and of the Chemical Weapons Convention and that those responsible for its use will be held accountable, and states that any future use will trigger Chapter VII measures under the United Nations Charter. Those responsible for these horrific acts must be held accountable.

In this respect, the EU fully supports the decision of the Director-General to have the FFM continue its work and considers it very important that the Director-General brief the United Nations Security Council on the findings of the FFM in coordination with the Secretary-General as necessary, pursuant to United Nations Security resolution 2118 (2013). The EU lauds the professionalism and commitment of the members of the FFM and calls on all parties in the Syrian Arab Republic to extend their full cooperation to the FFM and to ensure that it carries out its work in a safe, independent and effective manner.

The EU reiterates its concern about the insufficient information provided by the Syrian Government regarding questions arising from the discrepancies and inconsistencies in the initial declaration and subsequent Syrian explanations to the Technical Secretariat. It is regrettable that despite raising specific concerns repeatedly in the past, these worrying discrepancies have still to be addressed: namely the lack of original documentation, the fate of the 2000 aerial bombs that Syria claims to have converted, various questions concerning a ricin programme, the actual role of the SSRC in the Syrian chemical programme, the lack of information about small caliber munitions and, the recent analytical findings in relation to the samples taken by the DAT, showing traces of chemicals directly linked to the production of VX and sarin. The list remains long. In this vein, we reiterate our call on the Syrian Arab Republic to take all necessary measures to provide sufficient proof that it does not retain chemical capabilities and that its chemical weapons programme is fully declared and completely and irreversibly dismantled. The EU urges the Syrian Arab Republic to submit the narrative document it has been compiling and all other evidence to support its claims. It goes without saying that the Executive Council needs to continue to monitor the situation in Syria closely as well as to remain seized of the matter.

At this juncture, the EU again calls on Syria to respect the Convention and fully meet all its obligations as specified in Article IV paragraph 16 of the Chemical Weapons Convention regarding the costs arising in connection with the elimination of its chemical weapons programme and the verification thereof. The EU proposal to use the Syrian “frozen assets” to this end represents a positive move in this respect. So it is disappointing that Syria has so far rejected that option. We thus regret that Syria’s obligations under the Convention in this regard are not met.

Turning to the other points of the agenda, we reiterate that achieving the goal of universality remains one of our principal challenges and call upon the few States not Party to the

Convention to ratify or accede without delay. The European Union has found encouraging the information provided by the OPCW that some of the remaining States not Party are close to acceding to the Convention and is looking forward to the swift completion of this process. The EU, through its latest voluntary financial contribution, continues its active support for reaching this common objective in support of the Technical Secretariat activity and stresses its willingness to assist new States to meet their obligations under the Convention.

Regarding the destruction of declared stockpiles and verification thereof we call on the possessor States to continue their efforts to complete the destruction in the shortest time possible in accordance with the provisions of relevant decisions of the Conference of the States Parties on the final extended deadlines.

We all want an effective OPCW, whose role will progressively have to be shifted as further progress on destruction is made from disarmament of chemical weapons to preventing their re-emergence. If it is to remain relevant, the OPCW will need to retain adequate verification capabilities. The EU supports the view that the Article VI verification regime should remain as effective as possible to prevent the re-emergence of chemical weapons. In addition to challenge inspections and investigations of alleged use, other means of enhancing the capabilities of the OPCW in this area should be considered, while it is important that the Organisation should continue having staff with the necessary skills and expertise to meet its operational requirements. The EU also welcomes the SAB's Working Group Report on Verification which identifies important recommendations for strengthening the Chemical Weapons Convention verification regime.

Furthermore, OPCW's close work with other relevant international organisations including the BTWC, ISU, CTBTO and IAEA is of particular importance. The close cooperation between the United Nations and the OPCW in the Syrian operation produced many valuable lessons to be learned. These should be evaluated and followed as soon as practicable. Regular engagement and cooperation with all stakeholders, including the chemical industry and civil society, ought to be further and fully utilised. The OPCW needs to adapt its work in a changing security environment as well as to developments in science and technology. The reports of the SAB provide valuable guidance in this respect.

National implementation of the Convention in accordance with Article VII remains a core objective and the EU urges all States Parties to put in place and enforce all necessary legislative and administrative measures. It is regrettable that 18 years after the Convention entered into force, a relatively high number of States Parties have yet to implement and enforce its provisions. The European Union acknowledges the often very serious challenges and competing priorities some States Parties face and continues assisting in this area, not only through the new voluntary contribution, but also through extensive outreach. We also support the Technical Secretariat's efforts to explore new ways of achieving progress in this area including through education and outreach.

The European Union attaches great importance to the work carried out under Article X, which constitutes one of the core pillars of the Chemical Weapons Convention. The European Union encourages all States Parties to submit adequate and timely declarations under Article X and increase offers of assistance. It is of utmost importance that the OPCW continue to increase the capacity of the Technical Secretariat and the States Parties to prevent, respond to and mitigate misuse or attacks involving toxic chemicals. We support

broadening the Technical Secretariat's cooperation with other relevant international organisations on emergency response to the use or threat of use of chemical weapons.

The European Union stands ready to discuss concrete proposals put forward under Article XI, in accordance with the relevant decision taken by the Third Review Conference in April 2013. In the light of recent developments in different parts of the world, relevant action regarding promotion of chemical safety and security has acquired even more importance. In this respect, the work of the open-ended Working Group on terrorism needs to continue with the view to considering the recommendations contained in the report of the Working Group's Chair to the Seventy-Second Session of the Executive Council and those contained in the Final Document of the Third Review Conference.

It is to be noted that the EU actively supports the OPCW activities regarding assistance, protection and international cooperation directed to States Parties from all regional groups with particular emphasis placed on support to the OPCW's Programme for Africa. We encourage States Parties to take advantage of the assistance provided through the funded activities, by participating in them according to their own needs.

Finally, the Member States of the European Union wish to thank the Director-General for presenting the draft Programme and Budget for 2016. We are looking forward to constructive deliberations and hoping that it will be possible for States Parties to agree on it in a timely manner.

In closing, I would like to request that this statement be circulated as an official document of this session of the Council and be published on the OPCW website and extranet.

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