

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY



**STATEMENT BY**

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United States Delegation to the Seventy-Ninth Session  
of the Executive Council  
Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons**

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Mr. Chairman,

Let me start by congratulating you on assuming the chairmanship of the Council, and to wish you every success in managing this responsibility. You can count on the full cooperation of my delegation in pursuing, and no doubt attaining, success in leading our proceedings.

Mr. Chairman,

Our Executive Council gathers today in regular session for the seventy-ninth time since the entry into force of Chemical Weapons Convention. The Convention is one of the most successful and consequential disarmament treaties ever developed by the community of nations. We can be proud of the significant contributions that the Convention and the OPCW have made to international security.

However, lest pride obscure our vision, none of us should be satisfied with our collective achievements as long as chemical weapons use continues in Syria. Events on the ground have required the Director General once again to activate the Technical Secretariat's Fact Finding Mission to investigate allegations of use of chlorine as a chemical weapon in Idlib Province, Syria in March of 2015 and later. These tragic events, occurring shortly after the OPCW found that in 2014 chlorine was systematically and repeatedly released as a chemical weapon from helicopters against three opposition-controlled villages in Syria, are sad and shameful. Let the shame, and personal accountability, fall upon those responsible for such use. But shame on us if we fail to cooperate in efforts to attribute responsibility for the continued use of chemical weapons one hundred years after the first massive use of chemical weapons in battle. Let our voices be undiminished in calling for those responsible to be held accountable. Doing so may require the OPCW to once again make available its expertise to an international mechanism under the aegis of the UN Security Council.

A separate Fact Finding Mission investigation has been launched to look into alleged use of chemical weapons by non-state actors in and around Damascus. As we have stated on many occasions, we condemn any use of chemical weapons, anywhere and by anyone. We do want to underline that the value of the Fact Finding Mission investigations resides, in particular, in the capacity to potentially confirm the use of chemical weapons and arrive at reasonable conclusions about the means and methods of delivery employed. If confirmed, allegations about use of chemical weapons by non-state actors and against Syrian soldiers' in and around Damascus are a serious matter. At the same time, the investigation of Syrian government's claims should not influence the investigation of the allegations that the Syrian regime has repeatedly used chlorine as a chemical weapon against civilians in northern Syria.

Mr. Chairman,

The work of the FFM, as well as that of the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) looking into gaps and inconsistencies in the Syrian chemical weapons declaration, epitomizes the kinds of challenges that the OPCW will need to confront in the future. In other words: the future is now. The way in which we respond to the new FFM reports, which we hope will be made available in September or soon thereafter, will speak volumes about the readiness of this organization to ensure that international obligations against the use of chemical weapons are complied with.

The Technical Secretariat has done an excellent job, under very difficult and often dangerous conditions, to continue the process of eliminating the Syrian chemical weapons program, as



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mandated by the Convention and the decisions of this Council and the UN Security Council. The job is not yet finished, in part because of operational safety and security concerns and unforeseen technical challenges. But most of all, the work before us is not yet finished because of the position taken by Syria on a full range of issues, including its continued refusal to come clean, once and for all, on the true extent of its chemical weapons program and stockpiles. And certainly our job is not done until we have done everything we can to hold accountable those responsible for the use of chlorine as a chemical weapon in Syria.

We look forward to the long-delayed destruction of the remaining declared chemical weapons production facilities in Syria. We note that four of the five tunnels have been verified as destroyed, and the destruction of the fifth may take place soon. The cost of the destruction of the tunnels and the pending destruction of the seven hangars has been borne by donors, but the cost of verification continues to be the responsibility of Syria - a cost that Syria has refused to pay.

Independent of the accounting practice that the Technical Secretariat may need to apply in order to register the actual funds available to it, it is important to underline that Syria's obligation to pay for all verifications subsists and the costs continue to accrue. The same is true of Syria's assessed contributions which, if not paid soon, will lead to Syria losing its voting rights in the Organization. It is disappointing and inexcusable that Syria will not avail itself of the opportunity it has been offered to use frozen assets to pay for its verification costs and assessed contributions.

Syria is not the only State Party that owes verification costs or assessed contributions to the OPCW. I take this opportunity to call upon the other States that owe substantial amounts of money - millions of Euros - to the OPCW to correct this situation without delay. Without these funds, there is a risk that the OPCW might not be able to carry out its approved program.

Mr. Chairman,

We share with the Director General and many OPCW Member States the conviction that the OPCW must continue to enhance its capacity to investigate alleged use of chemical weapons or conduct other contingency operations. An adequate number of proficient inspectors able to participate on short notice in an investigation of alleged use must be maintained at all times. At the same time, the forensic skills of the TS and designated laboratories must also be enhanced. My delegation believes that the success of the Organization in preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons rests to a considerable extent on the linkage between the capacity of the OPCW to investigate use and the ability of the international community to hold accountable those responsible for use.

Mr. Chairman,

Let me now turn to other important issues before us. We welcome the level of interest among delegations in the future of the Organization, and commend the efforts and leadership of the Director General and the TS in offering a vision towards our shared goal of ensuring that the OPCW remains a bulwark against the use and re-emergence of chemical weapons. Preparing for the future is certainly not a new challenge for the OPCW. What's new is the severity with which the capacity and resolve of the Organization are being tested today, and how our response to these challenges will define our effectiveness today and in the years to come.



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The collective goal of the OPCW is to increase international security and we foresee that the endeavor will continue beyond the destruction of the currently declared stockpiles by 2023. But the way in which it does, will need to adapt to the current and future challenges. The security context in which the OPCW works has changed markedly since the Convention came into force and can be expected to continue to change in the next 10 years. Verification of compliance with the Convention, through industry inspections, possible investigations of alleged use, and support for the complementary and mutually-reinforcing implementation of all of the articles in the Convention will continue to require the services and expertise of the Technical Secretariat and the political guidance of the OPCW's policy making organs. The OPCW is needed beyond 2023 and is indeed an organization of unlimited duration.

We also foresee the OPCW serving as a platform for dialogue on any issue pertaining to chemical weapons, for example, so-called Incapacitating Chemical Agents (ICAs).

We commend the efforts of the Australian and Swiss delegations in promoting dialogue on this important issue. In this respect, we encourage all delegations to consider and subscribe to the notion that the development of so-called incapacitation agents for law enforcement purposes is incompatible with the Chemical Weapons Convention and to put their views on the record in the Executive Council. My own delegation has clearly done so, stating that "the U.S. is not developing, producing, stockpiling or using incapacitating chemical agents." We restate our position here and now.

Mr. Chairman,

We have recently received a copy of the draft Programme and Budget for the OPCW in 2016, and my delegation is reviewing it carefully. While it is not part of the agenda for this EC session, we appeal to the Organization and its Member States to view the Programme and Budget as a tool to present well-established priorities, properly documented and adequately supported, rather than a means to come up with activities to replace others that no longer command a large share of the OPCW's budget. In other words, let us agree on priorities and work together to fund them, rather than seek funding for vaguely defined replacement activities. We also think that, if an OPCW activity and its operational costs and staff decrease, so should, proportionally, the administrative support costs and staff of the Organization.

Mr. Chairman,

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the delegations of China and Japan on their collaborative efforts to continue to destroy abandoned chemical weapons as soon as possible. By all accounts, the recent visit of the EC delegation to Haerbaling, China, which you led, was very successful in further educating this Council about the importance and magnitude of this endeavor.

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

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

