

**SLOVAKIA****STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE EUROPEAN UNION
DELIVERED BY H.E. AMBASSADOR ROMAN BUZEK
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF SLOVAKIA TO THE OPCW
AT THE EIGHTY-SECOND SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Madam Chairperson,

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

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

At the outset, allow me to congratulate you and the other members of the Executive Council on the assumption of your duties and to assure you of our continuous support for your endeavours. On this occasion I would like to express our appreciation for the work carried out by the former Chairperson Ambassador Azzarello of Italy and the former members of the Executive Council for their efforts and work.

I would also like to thank the Director-General for his introductory statement, which as always provides useful guidance for our work. I would also like to reiterate our appreciation to him and to the OPCW staff for their commitment to the work of the Organisation and for their efforts regarding the ongoing Syrian chemical weapons operation in particular. We look forward to participating actively in the deliberations during this week.

We find it particularly regrettable and worrisome that we are still confronted with two unacceptable pending issues, notably the gaps and contradictions contained in the Syrian chemical weapons declarations and the continued use of chemical weapons despite the completion of the destruction process of all chemical weapons declared by the Syrian Arab Republic and the near completion of the destruction process of the declared production facilities.

Indeed it is highly regrettable that as the Director-General has reported, “following extensive technical consultations, the Secretariat considers that many of the explanations provided by the Syrian Arab Republic are not scientifically or technically plausible and that the presence of several undisclosed chemical warfare agents is still not clarified”. It is deeply troubling



that the Syrian authorities have not used the last chance to come clean that was given to them by the Executive Council's Eighty-First Session.

This time round, the EU is obliged to express its grave concern not only about the insufficient information provided by the Syrian Government regarding discrepancies in its initial declaration, but also regarding the fact that traces of undeclared chemicals and precursors have been discovered by the Declaration Assessment Team in various locations including a R&D facility, also undeclared at the time. Thus, regrettably the list of inconsistencies has been further increasing: the lack of original documentation, undeclared R&D facilities, the fate of the 2,000 aerial bombs that the Syrian Arab Republic 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, samples taken by the DAT. We also note the claim by the Syrian authorities that they "discovered" documents which the Technical Secretariat requested two years ago, and which the Syrian authorities had previously claimed were non-existent or destroyed. This claim is simply not credible, illustrates Syria's repeated failure to cooperate fully with the Secretariat, and raises serious questions as to whether other such documents still exist, contrary to Syrian claims. The Syrian authorities have been unable to provide sufficient and verifiable evidence that they do not retain chemical capabilities and that their chemical weapons programme is fully declared and completely and irreversibly dismantled. In view of all these negative developments, we believe it is necessary that this session of the Executive Council expresses utmost concern that the Syrian authorities have failed to provide the necessary meaningful cooperation with the Secretariat, have failed to provide the information necessary to answer the large number of unanswered questions and have failed to demonstrate a sincere intention to meet their obligations under the Convention.

In parallel, the EU strongly condemns the recorded continued use of chemical weapons against innocent civilians. We reiterate that the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anytime, anywhere and under any circumstances is abhorrent and must be wholly condemned. The international community cannot remain silent when challenged by the use of chemical weapons.

In this vein, the EU fully supports the decision of the Director-General to continue the work of the FFM. We would like to commend the professionalism and commitment of the staff working within the FFM and we call on all parties in the Syrian Arab Republic to extend to them their full cooperation to ensure that they can carry out their tasks in a safe, independent and effective manner. It is also important that the Director-General continues to brief the United Nations Security Council on the findings of the FFM in coordination with the United Nations Security Council as necessary. The EU strongly supports United Nations Security Council resolution 2209 (2015), which decided that those responsible for such acts must be held accountable, and that any future use will trigger Chapter VII measures under the United Nations Charter. We also support United Nations Security Council resolution 2235 (2015) setting up a Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) to identify perpetrators of chemicals attacks in the Syrian Arab Republic with the assistance of the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission. We recall that the EU has contributed EUR 4.6 million in support of the JIM/FFM activities equally divided among them. We look forward to the upcoming JIM report.

The EU finds disappointing that the Syrian Arab Republic has to date rejected the option to use its "frozen assets" to fully meet all its obligations as specified in Article IV paragraph 16 of the Convention regarding the costs arising in connection with the elimination of its chemical weapons programme and the verification thereof.

We also appreciate that Iraq keeps this Council informed about the allegations of use of chemical weapons by non-State actors on its territory. We welcome this cooperation which illustrates the value for States Parties of cooperating with the OPCW when facing the threat or the use of chemical weapons.

The EU believes that the OPCW has a role to play when it comes to chemical terrorism. This Organisation—and this Council—has to prove to the international community that they are aware of this threat and ready to take necessary steps to counter it. The EU, therefore, supports a draft decision on this issue to be adopted by this Council as soon as possible.

Turning to the other points of the agenda, we underscore that universality remains one of our principal challenges. We call upon the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Egypt, Israel and South Sudan to join the Convention without delay. The EU, through its current voluntary financial contribution and relevant action, continues its active support to the Technical Secretariat's efforts in reaching this common objective and stresses its willingness to assist new States Parties to meet their obligations under the Convention.

We call on the possessor States to complete the destruction of declared stockpiles and verification thereof in the shortest time possible in accordance with the provisions of relevant decisions of the Conference of the States Parties. It is recalled that the EU, its Member States and many other States Parties have supported this action with financial assistance.

Regarding other points of concern, we note that the issue of the remaining Libyan Category 2 chemical weapons has still not been resolved. Notwithstanding Libya's obligations under the Convention in this regard, we recognise that there are specific compelling security and practical obstacles that are preventing an expeditious solution to this problem. We note too that Libya is now taking active steps to overcome these, including its request for international assistance on destruction of its remaining Category 2 chemical weapons. The Executive Council must remain seized of this question until a solution is found and agreed. The EU will support any agreed action that will lead to the swift fulfillment of this goal.

As further progress on destruction is made, we progressively move from disarmament of chemical weapons to preventing their re-emergence. The EU wants a successful security and disarmament organisation that will remain relevant in the face of the new challenges. In its future role, the OPCW will need to retain or enhance several of its capabilities and primarily ensure an adequate verification regime, including investigations of alleged use and challenge inspections. We welcome the upcoming creation of a facilitation mechanism on the future priorities of the OPCW, as decided by the Twentieth Session of the Conference of the States Parties, and we look forward to a constructive discussion with all interested parties on this important issue. The note by the Technical Secretariat on the future role of the Organisation and the conclusions of the retreat organised by the Director-General in October 2015 have provided us with ample food for thought.

At this point, we need to stress that the effective implementation of the Article VI verification regime is a key in preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons. Hence, the need for the Organisation to continue to ensure that staff has the necessary skills and expertise to meet its operational requirements is a *sine qua non*.

National implementation of the Convention in accordance with Article VII remains a core obligation and the EU urges all States Parties to put in place and enforce all necessary legislative and administrative measures. We support the work of the facilitator on Article VII based on the outcome of his extensive interaction with all regional groups and welcome his non-paper that should enable the Technical Secretariat, with States Parties, to work on ways to improve OPCW programmes in this regard. The European Union acknowledges the often very serious challenges and competing priorities States Parties may face. We continue to assist in this field, not only through the current 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 through tailor-made solutions.

The European Union attaches great importance to the work carried out under Article X, which constitutes one of the pillars of the Convention. The EU encourages all States Parties to submit adequate and timely declarations under Article X and to increase offers of assistance. It is of the highest importance that the OPCW continues to broaden its cooperation with other relevant international organisations on emergency response to the use or threat of use of chemical weapons. We believe that cooperation with the regional EU Centres of Excellence can be of particular importance in this direction.

The EU actively supports the OPCW activities regarding assistance, protection and international cooperation directed to States Parties from all regional groups. It is recalled that the current EU Council Decision for the years 2015 to 2017 contains many projects designed to advance work in this area 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 these funds, by participating in the activities according to their own needs.

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, we acknowledge the importance of action to promote chemical safety and security.

The rapid deterioration of the global security environment necessitates the OPCW to adapt its work accordingly by interacting with other regional and global actors if it is to remain relevant in this area. In this respect, we express appreciation to the Secretariat for issuing relevant documents and for organising frequent relevant consultations with the participation of external stakeholders who bring their valuable experience to our discussions. We also expect the Open-Ended Working Group on Terrorism and the Sub-Working Group on non-State actors under their able Chairs to look into some of these new challenges and to make appropriate practical recommendations.

The EU stresses the significance of the OPCW's close work with other stakeholders and in particular with relevant international organisations including the BTWC-ISU, the CTBTO and the IAEA. The close cooperation between the United Nations and the OPCW in the Syrian operation represents an example in point with many valuable lessons to be learned. The mutual benefits of regular engagement and cooperation with other stakeholders, including chemical industry, academia and civil society, ought to be fully explored. In this respect, we take a good note of the reports of the SAB which provide valuable guidance regarding the developments in science and technology. We also welcome the first session of the Advisory Board on Education and Outreach and we are looking forward to its recommendations.

Finally, we wish to thank the Director-General for presenting the 2017 Programme and Budget. The Member States of the European Union, whose contributions amount to more than 40% of the OPCW budget, will contribute actively in the relevant consultations. The Member States of the EU support the need for a Programme and Budget, which will allow the Organisation to discharge its core tasks and activities and remain relevant amidst emerging challenges. We seize this opportunity to call on States Parties that are in serious arrear of payment of their annual contribution. By not paying what they owe to the OPCW, they take a big responsibility in disturbing the financial balance of the Organisation.

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.

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