

**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-THIRD SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mrs Chairperson,

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

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

At the outset, I would also like to thank the Director-General for his opening statement, which provided useful guidance for our work. I wish to reiterate our appreciation to him and to the OPCW staff for their commitment to the work of the Organisation and to their efforts regarding the ongoing Syrian chemical weapons operation in particular. We look forward to participating actively in the work of the Eighty-Third Session of the Executive Council.

The European Union is appalled by the recurring and systematic use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic, as confirmed by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. We have noted with outrage the report by the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM), confirming that the Syrian Armed Forces and so called ISIL/Da'esh have carried out such attacks. We find the continued use of chemical weapons in the country by the Syrian authorities and by so called ISIL/Da'esh deeply shocking and disturbing. The third report of the JIM identifies the responsibility of the Syrian Government in at least two cases of chlorine attack incidents. This is the first time in the history of the OPCW that an independent body, created by the United Nations Security Council through its resolution 2235 (2015), has confirmed the use of chemical weapons by a State Party to the Chemical Weapons Convention. This clear case of non-compliance with the provisions of the Convention warrants appropriate action as envisaged by United Nations Security Council resolution 2118 (2013) and foreseen in the Convention. In this vein, we fully support the relevant draft Council decision "Reports of the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism Regarding Chemical Weapons Use in Syria" and express the hope that the Executive Council will adopt it by consensus. The credibility of the Convention and the OPCW is at stake. There can be no impunity and perpetrators of these horrific attacks must be held accountable. We stand united in condemning, in the strongest terms, all use of chemical weapons in the Syrian



Arab Republic or anywhere else, by anyone, including non-State actors, and under any circumstances. The use of chemical weapons constitutes a violation of international law, a war crime, and a crime against humanity.

The EU fully supports the decision of the Director-General to continue the work of the FFM, especially in view of the very recent alleged incidents. 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 and its Member States have supported by significant contributions the work of the OPCW in verifying the dismantling of the declared Syrian chemical weapons programme. But the EU remains concerned over the gaps, inconsistencies, and discrepancies in the Syrian Arab Republic's declaration. The EU strongly supports the work of the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) but is forced to deplore the fact that, as the Director-General stated in his report at our July session of the Executive Council, due to the Syrian response the OPCW cannot confirm that the Syrian declaration is "exact and exhaustive". We urge the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to extend full cooperation to the Technical Secretariat, without delay or further prevarication to resolve all outstanding issues and convince the international community that its chemical weapons programme has been completely and irreversibly dismantled. This Executive Council cannot accept the Syrian Arab Republic's refusal to declare facilities that, according to the Technical Secretariat, should be declared.

The EU finds it 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 paragraph 16 of Article IV of the Convention regarding the costs arising in connection with the elimination of its chemical weapons programme and the verification thereof.

Earlier this year, the risk that terrorists could acquire some of the remaining Libyan chemicals warranted a swift international action. The EU welcomes the successful removal of the remaining chemical weapon precursors from Libya for destruction outside the country. This constitutes a positive and important development for Libya's stabilisation. But it also illustrates the relevance of the OPCW vis-à-vis the risk of non-State actors and chemical weapons.

We commend the OPCW for planning the safe removal and destruction of the chemicals to which the Libyan Government and several States Parties contributed through providing personnel, technical expertise, equipment, financial and other resources. Several Member States of the EU played a key role in this operation. These include Denmark, Germany, Finland, France, Italy, Malta, Spain and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The EU and its Member States confirm their readiness to support the full implementation of the destruction plan.

We also appreciate that Iraq keeps this Council informed about its investigations of the allegations of use of chemical weapons by non-State actors on its territory and welcome the support of the Technical Secretariat. We welcome this cooperation which illustrates, once

again, the value for States Parties to cooperate with the OPCW when facing the threat or the use of chemical weapons, including by non-State actors.

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 address these challenges including with other regional and global actors. The European Union is gravely concerned about the risk of State and non-State actors acquiring such weapons, which has already become a dark reality in the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq. The implementation of all Articles of the Convention constitutes a tangible contribution to the effort to prevent and respond to acts of terrorism and by non-State actors in the field of chemical security. The EU believes that the Council should not remain silent on threats posed by non-State actors and calls for the swift adoption of the relevant draft decision.

As the Director-General reported in EC-83/DG.11, dated 31 July 2016, 42 States Parties have not yet implemented the Chemical Weapons Convention. National implementation of the Convention in accordance with Article VII remains, however, a core obligation and the EU urges all States Parties to put in place and enforce all necessary legislative and administrative measures. In this respect, we support the work of the facilitator on Article VII in the hope that the outcome of his extensive interaction with all regional groups will result in identifying useful solutions thereof. The European Union continues to assist in this field, not only through the current voluntary contribution, but also through extensive outreach.

Turning to the other points of the agenda, we underscore that universality remains one of our principal challenges. We once again call upon the States not yet Party, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Egypt, Israel and South Sudan to ratify or accede to the Chemical Weapons Convention without delay, thus contributing to the goal of a world free of chemical weapons. The EU, through its current voluntary financial contribution and relevant action, continues its active support to the Technical Secretariat's efforts 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. It is recalled that the EU and EU-Member States have supported this action with financial assistance.

Turning to the future of the OPCW: The EU wants a successful security and disarmament organisation that will remain relevant in the face of 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. In parallel the issue of chemical security and safety should be given adequate importance to cope with recent developments. We look forward to a constructive discussion in the OEWG on the future priorities of the OPCW.

Effective implementation of the Article VI verification regime is key in preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons. The Organisation needs to ensure that its staff has the necessary skills and expertise to meet its operational requirements. We believe that this may require some limited revision to the tenure policy in order to avoid the loss of skills and expertise. The EU encourages further discussion on SAB recommendations aiming at strengthening the Chemical Weapons Convention's verification regime.

The EU encourages all States Parties to submit adequate and timely declarations under Article X, and to increase offers of assistance. The OPCW should continue to focus on the capacity of the Technical Secretariat to support States Parties to prevent, respond to and mitigate incidents or attacks involving toxic chemicals. The European Union continues to support activities related to national implementation, assistance and protection, international cooperation and in particular the Africa Programme. We believe that cooperation with the regional EU Centres of Excellence can be of particular importance in this direction.

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.

Finally, we wish to thank the Technical Secretariat, all States Parties and the facilitators that contributed to the consultations on the 2017 Programme and Budget. The Member States of the European Union, whose contributions amount to more than 40% of the OPCW budget, have actively contributed in the relevant discussions. The Member States of the EU support the need for a Programme and Budget which will allow the Organisation to discharge of its core tasks and activities and remain relevant amidst the 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 undermining the effective functioning of the Organisation and in constraining the resources available to support States Parties in need of assistance.

Thank you Mrs Chairperson.

- - - 0 - - -