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FRANCE

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR MR PHILIPPE LALLIOT
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF FRANCE TO THE OPCW AT
THE EIGHTY-THIRD SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Madam Chairperson,
Mr Director-General,
Distinguished Ambassadors,
Ladies and gentlemen,

France aligns itself with the statement made by my colleague from Slovakia on behalf of the European Union.

Today I would have liked to speak to you about the 2017 Programme and Budget of the Organisation, and about the agreement that we reached during the facilitation meetings. I would have liked to speak to you about the importance of maintaining a sound financial situation at the OPCW, to enable the Technical Secretariat to carry out all of its activities. I would have liked to speak to you about non-State actors and the role of the Organisation, and about the facilitation work undertaken by France within the framework of the discussions on the implementation of Article VII of the Convention, and even about the success of the operation to remove and destroy Libyan precursors. And I would have liked to speak to you especially about the future of the Organisation and the importance that France attaches to the discussions which began last month under the co-chairmanship of the Ambassador of Canada and the Ambassador of South Africa, as well as about the role of the OPCW in addressing the use of chemical weapons by non-State actors. Finally, I would have liked to speak to you about Syria, as you might imagine.

But what concerns us today is nothing less than the threat that looms over the very existence of our Organisation, caused by the repeated violations of the Convention, the integrity of which we are supposedly here to defend. On 24 August 2016, the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) on chemical weapons attacks in Syria submitted its third report. On three occasions, this independent mechanism – established by United Nations Security Council resolution 2235 (2015) – concluded that chemical weapons had been used in Syria in 2014 and 2015. Who carried out these attacks? On two occasions, the JIM concluded that the Syrian Armed Forces and, through them, the Syrian Government, used chemical weapons, specifically chlorine gas: in Talmenes on 21 April 2014 and then in Sarmin on 16 March 2015. The JIM further concluded that Da'esh was responsible for the attack, this time with mustard gas, that was carried out in Marea on 21 August 2015.

For the first time in the history of the Organisation, a State Party to the Convention – Syria – was found to have used chemical weapons. Also for the first time, a terrorist group



was found to have done the same. These findings come to us from a mechanism whose principles, mandate, and working methods were approved unanimously by the United Nations Security Council. Today it is up to our Organisation, and specifically this Council and its members, to speak up about these findings and to speak out strongly against this breach of the entire non-proliferation regime.

We must condemn. But we must also act. The OPCW is the international community's first line of defence against the use of chemical weapons, the guarantor in maintaining the international norm. Taking action at our level means adopting an appropriate decision condemning the use of chemical weapons by a State Party—the Syrian Arab Republic—and by a terrorist group—Da'esh. This decision should also enable us to adopt a series of measures aimed at reducing in future the risk of these weapons ever being used again. The draft decision presented by the United States of America does nothing less than that. The measures, whether in the form of sanctions or whether they propose the establishment of a strengthened verification system, make good sense, and France supports them. It is both the role and duty of the OPCW to work in the fight against the use and re-emergence of chemical weapons.

Throughout this session, some will attempt to tell us that the JIM's findings are not conclusive, I dare say. We will also be told that the working methods, leading to the finding that the Syrian Armed Forces twice used chemical weapons, are not reliable. This is to forget that the JIM previously submitted and published two reports in New York on its working methods, which at the time were accepted by everyone, including those who call them into question today. Furthermore, we will be told that these methods are not good for certain findings, but that for other findings they should be taken as they stand. We are not here to choose what suits us and to disregard that what does not: on the whole, the JIM's findings are troubling, and require action from the Council.

The subject is so important that we witnessed, after the draft decision presented by the United States, the submission of a second draft decision by the Russian Federation. France takes note of this draft, which illustrates once again the need for us to take a decision on this matter. In accordance with the rules of the Executive Council, and even though we have reviewed the Russian draft with interest, we must first take a decision on the American draft. France supports a culture of consensus that is so dear to this Organisation, and which has been its hallmark and made it effective. But France will not compromise on the universal principles that are upheld by the Organisation. Consequently, you can count on the participation of France in the discussions that will help us to integrate into the first draft all of the elements deemed relevant by the Council.

The threat to our Organisation is real. We must live up to our responsibilities and speak out strongly against the abomination of the use of chemical weapons. You can rely on France to remain steadfastly committed at your side in this endeavour.

I thank you for your attention and ask that this statement be considered as an official document of the Eighty-Third Session of the Executive Council.