

STATEMENT BY THE GROUP OF AFRICAN STATES PARTIES TO THE CHEMICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION DELIVERED BY H.E. MR. ABDELOUAHAB BELLOUKI, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE KINGDOM OF MOROCCO TO THE ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS (OPCW) AT THE EIGHTY-FOURTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL OF THE OPCW (EC84)

THE HAGUE, THE NETHERLANDS, TUESDAY, MARCH 7TH, 2017

Madam Chairperson, Distinguished Delegates,

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of African States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC).

From the start, allow me to congratulate and welcome back, Ambassador Odette Melono of Cameroon, as the Chairperson of the Executive Council and also to express our confidence in your able leadership to steer this session to a successful conclusion.

In addition, the African Group associate itself with the Statement of Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and China, which was delivered by the Group's Coordinator, H.E. Haifa Aissami Madah, the Permanent Representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the OPCW.

Madam Chairperson

The African Group wishes to express its gratitude to the Director-General, H. E. Ambassador Ahmet Üzümcü, for his informative and comprehensive report delivered in this Session. The Group appreciates his continuous efforts and those of his team in the Technical Secretariat, in promoting the role of the Organization in the International Disarmament regime and ably carrying out its functions under the Convention.

Madam Chairperson

As the Organization celebrates its 20th Anniversary this year, it is important to point out that almost all African countries are State Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention. The near-universal intake and absorption of the Convention continues to demonstrate the commitment and the importance that the African continent attaches to a world free of chemical weapons.

In this regard, we welcome and strongly support the decision to establish the Programme to Strengthen Cooperation with Africa on the Chemical Weapons Convention and further welcome the decision of the Twenty First Session of the Conference of State Parties, C-21/5 of December 2nd, 2016, on the continuation of this Programme.

Further, the Group is particularly supportive of the proposal in the Africa Programme – under the International Cooperation and Assistance Programme – of the need to have designated laboratories in the African continent. We believe that the accreditation of at least three (3) OPCW laboratories across the continent will not only capacitate it, but will also lead to an effective global network of laboratories that the OPCW can call upon in the implementation of the Convention.

In addition, the African Group notes with appreciation that the Fourth Phase of the Africa Programme began on January 1st, 2017 for another three-year period. We urge that the Programme be backed by regular budgetary allocations and less reliant on voluntary funding so as to ensure predictability and sustainability of the Programme.

Equally, the African Group emphasises continued support of the OPCW in the area of sensitisation, especially for decision makers, through special programs with the view to simplify and fast track the process of domestication of the Convention. We believe that without a clearly defined legal framework, implementation of the Convention will prove difficult and National Authorities will lack the necessary legal force to effectively discharge their mandate.

Madam Chairperson

On weapons of mass destruction, the African Group wishes to reiterate its long-standing principled position toward the achievement of general and complete disarmament, under strict and effective international control, including the prohibition and elimination of all weapons of mass destruction, in line with the first paragraph of the preamble of the Convention.

In this regard, the African Group commends the achievements made in relation to the process of destruction of the remaining Category II chemical weapons in Libya, in line with the obligations pursuant to the Convention.

Madam Chairperson

On the Rapid Response and Assistance Mission (RRAM), the African Group appreciates the efforts made by the Director General to achieve the goals and

objectives of the Convention and takes note of the latest letter presented by him regarding the RRAM referring to what the OPCW is doing within the framework of the Convention to strengthen its capabilities in fulfilling its mandate set out in article X. We are convinced that it is of utmost importance that this mechanism and its operational aspects be applied in a manner, which is consistent with the Convention, upon request from a State Party experiencing an emergency and in need of special measures of assistance. In this regard, we believe that it is necessary that State Parties should be accorded reasonable time to study it and to reach appropriate conclusions regarding this new mechanism, in particular for its practical arrangements, before its deployment.

Madam Chairperson

On Syria, the African Group notes, the existence of weapons of mass destruction continues to pose a threat to international peace and security. In addition, the African Group continues to underline that the use of chemical weapons and toxic chemicals, as a weapon, anywhere by anyone and under any circumstances is reprehensible and completely contrary to the provisions of the Convention and all norms of international law. We also affirm that those responsible for the use of chemical weapons must be held accountable.

In this regard, the African Group notes with concern the conclusions in the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigate Mechanism (JIM) reports on the use of chemical weapons in the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic.

We urge the continued cooperation of the Syrian Arab Republic regarding the implementation of the relevant Executive Council decisions towards the elimination of all of its Chemical Weapons and Chemical Weapons Production Facilities. We further encourage continued sincere dialogue between the Syrian Arab Republic and the Technical Secretariat in order to resolve and clarify issues raised by the various Joint Investigative Mechanisms.

Madam Chairperson

On International Cooperation, the African Group attaches great importance to the full, effective and non-discriminatory implementation of all provisions of Article XI and emphasize the need to speed up efforts in this regard.

Therefore, the Group welcomes the efforts being made by the Technical Secretariat to enhance the implementation of Article XI, as demonstrated by the Review and Evaluation Workshop on the Components of an Agreed Framework for the Full

Implementation of Article XI held in November of 2016. We believe that this requires continuous collaboration between the Technical Secretariat and the States Parties.

On Education and Outreach, the African Group recognizes the importance of the programmes in achieving the main objectives of the Convention. The Group welcomes the work done by the Advisory Board on Education and Outreach, including all regional meetings held to contribute in formulating recommendations on education and outreach.

Madam Chairperson

The African Group commends the work of the Open-Ended Working Group on the Future Priorities, under the co-Chairmanship of H.E. Vusi Bruce Koloane of South Africa and H.E. Sabine Nölke of Canada, to discuss and formulate recommendations on the Future Priorities of the OPCW for consideration at the Fourth Review Conference. We stress the importance of this Working Group and encourage it to continue its work in the spirit of consultations and ownership in order to face up to the future challenges of the Organization.

The African Group will constructively engage in the discussions, particularly through the proposed African Programme Review Based Mechanisms, with a strong belief that all pillars of the Convention would be treated in a balanced manner, including the ones related to international cooperation, assistance and protection issues, amongst others.

On the Open-Ended Working Group on Terrorism, the Group commends the work of the Chairperson, H.E. Dr. Joe Tony Aidoo of Ghana and the Chairperson of the Sub-Working Group on Non-State Actors, H.E. Maria Teresa Infante of Chile.

With reference to the latest discussions on Inter-Agency Cooperation, the Group calls upon the Technical Secretariat to engage with the African Union and other regional Groups in these deliberations, in order to take into account the realities of the various State Parties.

To conclude, Madam Chairperson, the African Group wishes to extend its gratitude to you for expertly leading our activities during Your Excellency's mandate. We also wish to acknowledge the valuable work done by H.E. Dr. Joe Tony Aidoo of Ghana and the Group wishes him all the best in his future endeavors.

I thank you for your attention.