

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY



**STATEMENT BY**

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Of the Executive Council  
Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons**

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Madam Chair, Mr. Director-General, distinguished ambassadors and delegates,

This is the first meeting of the Council since we last convened on November 11 to close out the eighty-third session of the Council. At that session, the Council adopted a landmark decision holding one State Party to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), the Syrian Arab Republic, accountable for its continued possession and lethal use of chemical weapons. Regrettably, despite the alarming findings of the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism, the Council was unable to reach consensus on that decision, thereby necessitating a vote in which four EC member states dissented. Two of those dissenting States Parties last week used their veto to block a broadly-supported resolution within the UN Security Council intended to ensure that the individuals and entities responsible for the Syrian government's use of chemical weapons are held accountable. The veto-induced impasse in the UN Security Council was blatantly at odds with the Security Council's decision in Resolution 2118 to impose measures under Chapter VII of the UN Charter in the event of Syria's non-compliance with that resolution.

By contrast, here in The Hague, the Executive Council has continued to fulfill its responsibilities under the CWC by mandating several significant steps to address Syria's continued possession and use of chemical weapons.

The Council decided that, as soon as security conditions permit, the Secretariat will conduct inspections at those sites identified by the Joint Investigative Mechanism as involved in the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian military. This includes two Syrian airfields from where aircraft carrying chlorine barrel-bombs were deployed. We urge the Director-General to continue to work with the UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) to determine when these mandated inspections can be carried out.

The Council also decided that the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Center complexes at Barzah and Jamrayah will be inspected biannually. It is inexcusable that the Syrian government used vague security claims, unsupported by UNDSS assessments, to delay the first of these inspections. We appreciate the diligent efforts of the Director-General in overcoming Syrian resistance and completing the inspections prior to this EC session. We look forward to reviewing a detailed report of the SSRC inspection.

Finally, we have carefully reviewed the report of the Director-General, pursuant to paragraph 40 of Article VIII, detailing unresolved doubts, ambiguities or uncertainties regarding the compliance of the Syrian Arab Republic with the Convention. A wide range of unresolved issues persist that fundamentally negate any confidence in the accuracy and completeness of Syria's declaration of its chemical weapons program. Among these many unresolved issues, Syria has failed to declare to the OPCW all chlorine stocks, associated barrel-bombs, and production facilities identified in the JIM findings with Syrian chemical weapons use. In sum, there is no evidence that Syria has embraced the change in approach called for by the Director-General in his July 2016 report to the Council. Until Syria decides finally to acknowledge the full scope of its CW program, resolution of the outstanding issues remains out of the reach of the Secretariat.

Madam Chair,

The Chemical Weapons Convention and the international norm against the use of chemical weapons are now under siege through State and non-State actor use of chemical weapons and, regrettably, the willingness of some to turn a blind eye to these heinous transgressions. The international community must take concerted action to prevent further use of chemical weapons and to hold fully accountable every actor involved in chemical weapons attacks. This Council has distinguished itself by condemning the CW use by the Syrian government and imposing new verification inspections. However, we must continue to defend the Convention and, as the preamble to the Convention asks of us, to act "for the sake of all mankind, to exclude completely

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the possibility of the use of chemical weapons, through the implementation of the provisions of the Convention...”

Madam Chair,

It is in that very same spirit of the Convention that this Council needs to address yet another heinous use of chemical weapons. As I am sure all delegations are aware, on February 13th, Kim Jong Nam was fatally attacked with a chemical substance in Malaysia’s Kuala Lumpur airport, which Malaysian authorities have identified as VX, one of the most dangerous nerve agents known to man. This heinous act defies all human decency and the norms of the civilized world against the use of chemical weapons. The Council has a solemn responsibility to condemn this barbaric attack. All of those individuals or entities involved, directly or indirectly, in perpetrating this attack must be held fully responsible.

Madam Chair,

The United States would like to express its appreciation for the Malaysian Government’s intensive investigation of this criminal act and its intention to bring those responsible for it to justice. We would welcome Malaysia keeping the Technical Secretariat and the Executive Council informed of all important developments. We also express deep appreciation for the Director-General’s offer to provide technical assistance to Malaysia’s national investigation and encourage them to work together on technical aspects of the ongoing inquiry. We are all in this together. Any use of chemical weapons, anywhere in the world, is a threat to all of us and a challenge to our shared determination to rid the world of these despicable weapons.

Madam Chair,

As this Council continues to address the Syrian chemical weapons crisis, we must not lose sight of the important efforts that must be undertaken this year to ensure the future effectiveness of the OPCW. Indeed, 2017 is a critical year for the future of the Organization.

The process of selecting our next Director-General will be initiated at this session of the Executive Council. In October, it will be the responsibility of the Council to recommend a candidate to the Twenty-Second Conference of the States Parties (CSP). Pursuant to Rule 82 of the CSP Rules of Procedure, the new Director-General “shall be appointed by the Conference upon the recommendation of the Executive Council...” This will be one of the most important decisions the Council will take this year. Let us all pledge to work together to identify and recommend an individual that embodies the diplomatic skills, managerial competence, and personal integrity needed to successfully lead the OPCW into the next decade.

Also, this year the Open-Ended Working Group on Future Priorities will continue its efforts in preparation for the Fourth CWC Review Conference. We are most fortunate to have two extraordinarily capable diplomats co-chairing this important effort. In considering future priorities, it is essential that this group assess the changing threat and technology landscapes in the context of the treaty’s fundamental goal of preventing the reemergence of chemical weapons. In the past, the principal focus was on the reemergence of traditional chemical weapons programs. While that concern endures, it is now complicated by new State actor threats of varying sophistication, which must not be allowed to create an unattended “back door” circumventing the Convention.

Toxic industrial chemicals, like chlorine, have been weaponized by the Syrian government through using barrel bombs rolled out of helicopters. Though relatively crude, chlorine barrel bombs have proven themselves many times to be heinous and deadly weapons. No doubt, those who would use chemical weapons have taken note of the potential for using common toxic industrial chemicals as weapons of war and terrorism.

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On the other end of technological spectrum, we should all be concerned by the potential of central nervous system-acting chemicals, such as fentanyl, to be used as deadly chemical weapons. Often, these chemical compounds are mischaracterized as so-called “incapacitants,” and, despite their proven deadly effect, some states are actively pursuing the development and deployment of these chemicals for supposed law enforcement purposes. We continue to have serious concerns about this rationale because there is no safe use for such chemicals outside of a controlled medical setting. We must commence a dialogue on how to ensure a common understanding that these chemicals may not be used for law enforcement.

The United States commends Australia and Switzerland for highlighting the risks posed to the Convention by what they have correctly described as central nervous system-acting chemicals. I can firmly state once again that the United States is not developing, producing, stockpiling, or using central nervous system-acting chemicals for law enforcement purposes, nor are we using riot control agents as a method of warfare.

Another alarming aspect of the evolving threat landscape is the development, acquisition, and use of chemical weapons by non-State actors. As this Council is well aware, chemical weapons attacks by the so-called Islamic State were confirmed by the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism and through a separate national investigation by the Iraqi government. The United States is aware of, and closely monitoring, very recent reports alleging the use of chemical weapons in Mosul, Iraq.

The threat of chemical weapons terrorism is very likely to increase, and this Council, looking ahead to the upcoming Fourth Review Conference, should do everything possible to address that threat through the Chemical Weapons Convention and the OPCW. The Council has before it a decision that calls for immediate enhancements that would help facilitate full implementation of Article VII of the Convention and bolster a range of other efforts aimed at addressing the threat posed by non-State actors. We should find a way to reach consensus this year on this important decision.

Indeed, ensuring that chemical weapons are globally eradicated, and then preventing any future re-emergence, will require a broad-based effort drawing upon multiple aspects of the Chemical Weapons Convention and the diverse capabilities of the Technical Secretariat. We will need to review the OPCW’s approach and capabilities for achieving effective verification in the context both of routine activities and contingency operations involving alleged use of chemical weapons. Ensuring that the Technical Secretariat continues to possess high levels of expertise will require innovative approaches to training and knowledge management.

Madam Chair,

As we look to the future, let us pause a moment to recognize the transformation this Organization has undergone since 2013 and the new challenges and responsibilities that this transformation entails. We are no longer just an arms control organization. As attested to by UN Security Council resolutions involving chemical weapons in Syria and Libya, the world has come to rely on the OPCW to help promote peace and security. The world has come to expect much more from the OPCW, and we must ensure that this Organization remains up to the task when called upon.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

I ask that this statement be designated an official document of the Executive Council session and posted on the external server and the public website.