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REPUBLIC OF KOREA

**STATEMENT BY H.E. CHOI JONG-MOON
DEPUTY MINISTER FOR MULTILATERAL AND GLOBAL AFFAIRS
AT THE EIGHTY-FOURTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Madam Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my honour and pleasure to make this statement at the Executive Council session, particularly with the 20th anniversary of the Chemical Weapons Convention (hereinafter “the Convention”) next month.

Over the past decades, the Convention has made remarkable achievements. It now has 192 Member States, and has achieved the destruction of 93% of all chemical weapons declared by Member States.

In a few years’ time, we will reach our final goal, that is, the complete destruction of chemical weapons of Member States.

The OPCW has also made progress in addressing the use of chemical weapons in the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic, including the Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) with the United Nations.

In order to prevent further uses of chemical weapons, it is imperative that the perpetrators, organisers and sponsors of the use of chemical weapons should be held accountable.

The Republic of Korea has made every effort to strengthen the international regime for chemical safety and security.

The Republic of Korea has been hosting the Seoul Workshop on the Peaceful Development and Use of Chemistry for Asian Member States in cooperation with the OPCW since 2012.

Korea has also made a contribution to the Trust Fund for the International Support Network for Victims of Chemical Weapons. Remembering and helping victims of chemical weapons are as important as preventing their future use.



Unfortunately, the remarkable achievements of the Convention as well as our fundamental goal, a world free of chemical weapons, are being seriously challenged by threats emerging outside the Convention.

Last month, the news came as a shock to the world that the brother of the North Korean leader was brutally assassinated in Malaysia. The Malaysian police confirmed that the victim was killed by VX nerve agent.

As VX has no other purpose than being an instrument of death, it is classified as a Schedule 1 chemical weapon and is thus strictly banned by the Convention.

The Republic of Korea has full confidence in the findings of the Malaysian authorities' investigation and joins the international community in strongly condemning the use of VX nerve agent for the targeted killing.

As the OPCW Executive Council decisions and the United Nations General Assembly resolutions have repeatedly emphasised, any use of chemical weapons anywhere, at any time, by anyone, under any circumstances is totally unacceptable.

More alarming is the fact that the suspects used such a lethal chemical in a public place, in this case the Kuala Lumpur international airport, where tens of millions of travellers from all over the world visit every year. As the Malaysian Government stated, the use of VX could have put the innocent general public in jeopardy.

The Republic of Korea strongly supports the Malaysian Government's efforts to bring those responsible for this heinous crime to justice. We also welcome the cooperation between the OPCW Technical Secretariat (hereinafter "the Secretariat") and Malaysia, and request the Secretariat to keep providing appropriate assistance to Malaysia.

We will never be free from the chemical nightmare unless we close the loopholes of the international system.

Yet four countries still have not joined the Convention. North Korea, in particular, has long been known for storing thousands of tons of chemical weapons including VX, and possessing a considerable capability to produce chemical weapons.

Indeed, North Korea's chemical weapons programme was considered to be a serious threat to international peace and security even before the launch of the Convention.

While we were negotiating and preparing for the entry into force of the Convention, the international community strongly demanded that North Korea sign the Convention, which North Korea refused to do.

Unfortunately, after this, North Korea's chemical weapons programme has long been eclipsed by its nuclear and missile programmes. We should no longer allow North Korea to stay outside the regime of the Convention.

The Republic of Korea strongly urges North Korea to join the Convention, destroy its chemical weapons, and accept verification under the provisions of the Convention.

Before I close, I would like to make a few points regarding this issue as follows;

First, my delegation requests the OPCW Director-General and the United Nations Secretary-General to send a joint letter urging North Korea to join the Convention immediately.

Second, we suggest that the Executive Council take measures to send a strong message that it will never allow any use of chemical weapons. They may include the adoption of a brief and factual decision condemning the use of VX in a public area.

Third, as soon as the Malaysian authorities release its final investigation report, we propose that Member States convene a special Executive Council meeting to discuss and take the necessary follow-up measures.

Fourth, taking this opportunity, my delegation wishes to recall that the United Nations Security Council resolutions 1718 (2006) and 2270 (2016) decided that North Korea shall abandon all weapons of mass destruction, including chemical weapons.

And last but not least, North Korea should immediately hand the suspects over to Malaysia as the Malaysian authorities have demanded for investigation.

In this regard, I wish to bring the international legal instruments on the safety of international airports to the attention of the Council.

The use of VX at an international airport constitutes an "offence" under the Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts against the Safety of Civil Aviation, as amended by the 1988 Supplementary Protocol.

The Convention regulates acts of violence that endanger or are likely to endanger the safety of international airports.

As a party to the Convention and the Protocol, North Korea, under its legal obligation, should immediately extradite those suspects.

In closing, I would like to request that this statement be included in the official documents of the Eighty-Fourth Session of the Executive Council and be published on the OPCW website and the extranet.

Thank you.

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