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**ITALY**

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR ANDREA PERUGINI  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF ITALY TO THE OPCW  
AT THE EIGHTY-FIFTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairperson,  
Director-General,  
Distinguished delegates,

H.E. Ambassador Sheikh Mohammed Belal of Bangladesh, I wish to congratulate you on your assignment as Chairperson of the Executive Council and thank your predecessor H.E. Ambassador Madame Odette Melono of Cameroon, for her leadership.

Italy supports the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union by the Permanent Representative of Estonia. I would like to add some additional remarks on some issues that are of particular concern to my delegation.

As recalled in various statements, this year marks the twentieth anniversary of the entry into force of the Convention. Italy wishes to express its gratitude to the Director-General for his tireless efforts to foster public knowledge of the Convention, of results achieved so far and challenges lying ahead. A particular gratitude is due to his participation as keynote speaker in the public event which took place in Rome on 23 May 2017, organised by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation together with the University of Rome, Tor Vergata. The presence of the Director-General and his active participation greatly contributed to shape an in-depth, thorough discussion, reinforcing public conscience of the importance of the global chemical non-proliferation regime.

This Executive Council Session will address the selection and appointment of the next Director-General. The selection represents a crucial step for the future of the Organisation.

This happens against the backdrop of a persisting failure by a State Party to demonstrate its full compliance with the Convention and while we are witnessing repeated violations of the prohibition of the use of chemical weapons in Syria, which were attributed to a State, as well as non-State actors. Persisting tensions and difficulties, as well as the protracted lack of accountability, are affecting the ability of the international community to act in defence of the Convention. The proper tools do exist; they are the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanisms (JIM) and the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission (FFM). It is our responsibility to support them consistently and consensually.



There is no doubt that in the broader view of disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control organisations, the OPCW is a unique case of success, a real ‘best practice’ for the way it has operated so far and the results it has achieved. We have a keen common interest in preserving, protecting and developing such precious heritage. Its credibility, integrity and impartiality cannot and should not be questioned. Our collective duty is to ensure full and complete implementation of the prohibition of chemical weapons, strengthen the chemical non-proliferation regime and work for the universalisation of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

The current Director-General will leave a well-functioning organisation, an efficient Technical Secretariat, a stable budget, and a structure with unrivalled expertise and experience, a common heritage of the States Parties. The management of this asset must therefore be entrusted to a “personality” capable not only of ensuring continuity and of further consolidating the validity and effectiveness of the Organisation, but also of injecting, while fully respecting the prerogatives of the States Parties and the obligations of the Convention, a new dynamic into an organisation designed to evolve over time and to enrich itself with renewed added value.

The next Director-General—while ensuring the continued hard core tasks of monitoring the evolution of chemical industry—shall need to help the transition of the Organisation from an era when the destruction of chemical stocks was a priority into a context marked by the emergence of new global challenges, such as the introduction in markets of new chemicals, the application of new technologies, the increasing use of toxic chemicals by non-State actors and, last but not least, chemical terrorism. For this reason, in selecting the new Director-General the candidate's ability to seize these evolutionary aspects should be a priority, in order to stimulate the States Parties with the utmost impartiality and to adapt the Organisation to such emerging challenges.

In seeking the new Director-General, we don't necessarily need a technical expert in chemistry or in chemical weapons, (this is the task of the Technical Secretariat's staff), but we need a candidate with a profile capable of handling with effectiveness the relationship with States parties, and the inputs he will no doubt receive, sometimes forcefully, from the States Parties themselves. The new Director-General must also be able to provide continuity with the current leadership of the OPCW, by continuing to meet the legitimate expectations of clarity and transparency expressed by the media and the international community, by ensuring compliance with the Convention, as well as by promoting the universality of membership.

Concerning the situation in Syria, let me add a few remarks to the concerns I have already raised. We are and remain very disappointed. We had expected further steps forward and, in particular, that the Declaration Assessment Team's (DAT) efforts would definitely close the gaps and eliminate discrepancies. On the contrary, the Technical Secretariat reported that it “is still not able to resolve identified gaps, inconsistencies, and discrepancies in Syria's declaration, and therefore cannot fully verify that Syria has submitted a declaration that can be considered accurate and complete in accordance with the Convention or Council decision EC-M-33/DEC.1 adopted in September 2013”.

I recall that in October 2013, an initial declaration of Syria was submitted and that it has been edited numerous times with different and contradictory narratives. In order to rapidly elucidate all discrepancies, the Director-General was obliged to set up the Declaration

Assessment Team, in April 2014, in order to seek credible responses to the persisting gaps and different inconsistencies.

After several years of discussions, the lack of a credible conclusion to the efforts of DAT remains a matter of grave concern. It is alarming and unacceptable that, despite the determination of the Director-General, it is not possible here, today, to say that we have confidence that Syria's chemical weapons programme has been completely dismantled, and the threat eliminated. We remain gravely concerned by ongoing reports on the use of chemical weapons in Syria and we encourage Damascus to continue efficient discussion with the Technical Secretariat to clarify all discrepancies also with particular, among other, to the loss of approximately 5 tonnes of DF, a precursor of Sarin.

Italy fully supports the efforts of the OPCW's Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) investigation on the use of chemical weapons in Khan Shaykhun as well as the OPCW-UN co-operation. We call on all parties in the Syrian Arab Republic to extend their full co-operation to the FFM staff. We also welcome the reactivation of work by the JIM and we are confident about the collaboration of all States Parties to the JIM investigation on the Khan Shaykhun and Um Housh incidents, in order to identify the perpetrators and make them accountable.

I kindly request that this statement be circulated as an official document of the Eighty-Fifth Session of the Executive Council and posted on the OPCW external server and web site. Thank you.

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