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SWITZERLAND

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR URS BREITER
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF SWITZERLAND TO THE OPCW AT THE
EIGHTY-SIXTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairperson,

Twenty years ago, the Convention on the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons entered into force. 2017 is therefore a symbolic year, as approximately 96 per cent of chemical weapons stockpiles declared by possessor States have been eliminated. It is also a decisive year for the future of the Organisation, as my colleague and friend Ambassador Fernando Arias, is the consensus candidate that this Executive Council will recommend to the Conference of the States Parties for the position of Director-General. In this context, I would like to thank you for the work accomplished throughout the entire nomination process. Lastly, it is a year marked by the significant achievement of the complete destruction of the Russian Federation's declared chemical weapons stockpile, with the completion of operations at the Kizner facility.

However, in spite of these positive developments, we cannot ignore the tragic event that occurred in 2017. The Khan Shaykhun chemical attack which took place on 4 April 2017 and resulted in over 80 deaths will remain as one of the worst attacks of this kind since the start of the war in the Syrian Arab Republic. The Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) confirmed the use of sarin gas and the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) is now tasked to identify the perpetrators of this flagrant violation of international law. Furthermore, the confirmation by the FFM of the presence of sarin in samples collected in Ltamenah constitutes yet another worrying development. We hope that the upcoming publication of the FFM report will allow the JIM to shed light on this incident. Switzerland expresses its full confidence in and support to these two mechanisms. Once again we call upon the United Nations Security Council to refer the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic to the International Criminal Court. Impunity in the face of such crimes increases the likelihood that such acts will occur again. Regarding the initial Syrian declaration, Switzerland is very concerned about the lack of substantial progress following last month's high-level consultation. The absence of sufficient and verifiable evidence confirming that the Syrian chemical weapons programme has been fully declared and dismantled leads us to the conclusion that the Syrian Arab Republic is not, up to this day, complying with its obligations as a member of this Organisation.

The challenges the OPCW faces are manifold. In order to address the threat posed by the use of chemical weapons by non-State actors, as well as to reaffirm the Organisation's role in terms of prevention and response to proven use, Switzerland believes that the adoption of the



decision on non-State actors is an essential step that will pave the way for future developments in this field.

Sustaining a quality verification regime is one of Switzerland's main concerns. We believe that the inclusion of a distinctive and limited group of non-scheduled chemicals in the Central Analytical Database (OCAD) contributes to this objective. We therefore, after being postponed twice already, call for the adoption without delay of the decision related to this matter.

In the encouraging light of the near complete destruction of all declared chemical weapons, the prevention of the re-emergence of chemical weapons is at the heart of the debate regarding the future of this Organisation. Switzerland firmly believes that it is necessary to engage in an inclusive and open debate on CNS acting chemicals within the framework of the decision-making bodies of the OPCW. Regarding the potential threats posed by this kind of chemical agent within the broader framework of law enforcement, Switzerland intends to continue its efforts, in partnership with Australia, to increase awareness among States Parties.

The Open-Ended Working Group on Future Priorities addressed a wide range of topics throughout the year. We would like to thank the Co-Chairs as well as the Technical Secretariat for all their efforts to successfully guide the work of this group. Switzerland believes that a substantive outcome document covering all the subjects dealt with in this framework will be useful and necessary in order to pursue the discussions in a targeted and effective manner during the phase leading up to the Fourth Review Conference.

In the context of present and future challenges the OPCW faces, the values of transparency, inclusiveness and openness are fundamental. In this regard, Switzerland supports the participation of non-governmental organisations at the Conferences of the States Parties and is concerned that several NGOs, including Human Rights Watch, were not extended an invitation for attendance and participation to the Twenty-Second Session of the Conference of the States Parties although they had requested it.

Finally, Switzerland is satisfied with the proposed programme and budget for 2018 which allows the Organisation to carry out its main tasks while paying particular attention to future challenges. The Advisory Body on Administrative and Financial Matters' recommendations (ABAF) are especially useful in this context.

Thank you.

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