



Latvian Presidency
of the Council of the
European Union

**Statement on behalf of the European Union
delivered by H.E. Māris Klišāns
Permanent Representative of Latvia to the OPCW
at the Forty-Eighth meeting of the Executive Council
(The Hague, 21 January 2015)**

Mr Chairman,
Mr Director-General,
Colleagues,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union.

The EU candidate countries Albania, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, the country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate country Bosnia and Herzegovina; the EFTA countries Iceland and Norway, as well as Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine align themselves with this statement.

Since this is the first time I take the floor under the Latvian Presidency, I would like to extend to you and the representatives of all State Parties my best wishes for the New Year and to assure you of our continuous support and cooperation. We are looking forward to participating actively in the deliberations of the Executive Council during the course of our Presidency. I would also like to thank the Director-General for his informative statement and to reiterate our appreciation to him and to the OPCW staff for their commitment to the work of the organization and the Syria CW operation in particular.

Mr Chairman,

While considerable progress has been achieved with the successful removal of the declared chemical weapons from Syrian territory in very challenging circumstances, as well as their near complete destruction, one cannot deny that almost one year and a half after the adoption of the plan for the dismantling of the Syrian CW programme, the elimination process has been greatly delayed and most of the agreed time lines have not been met. Furthermore, we continue to be faced with many uncertainties regarding the accuracy and completeness of the Syrian declarations and allegations of chemical weapon use continue to be made. The EU condemns all and any use of chlorine as a chemical weapon.

During the recent 19th Conference of State Parties, a great number of States, including the EU Member States, have voiced grave concerns over the findings of the Fact Finding Mission set up by the OPCW Director-General to establish the facts around allegations on the use of chlorine. The third report the FFM issued at the end of last year has confirmed that “it has found information constituting ‘compelling confirmation’ that a toxic chemical was used “systematically and repeatedly” “as a weapon”, while it refers to testimonies that these chemicals have been dropped from helicopters, an asset that only the Syrian government possesses. It is most alarming that the report, while strengthening the conclusions of the previous report by displaying a body of evidence and showing the professionalism with which this mission was led which no one can doubt, also referred to new allegations that chlorine has again been used during recent months.

The EU reiterates its fundamental position that the use of chlorine as a weapon constitutes a breach of the CWC and the UN Security Council Resolution 2118. The EU condemns the use of chlorine as a chemical weapon by the Syrian government and underlines that those responsible for these horrific acts must be held accountable. In the same vein, the EU fully supports the decision of the Director-General to have the FFM continue its work. The EU calls on the DG to brief the UNSC on the content of the three FFM reports in coordination with the SG as necessary, pursuant to the EC decision of September 27th 2013 and UNSC Res. 2118. Finally, we call on all parties in the Syrian Arab Republic to extend their full cooperation to the FFM to ensure that it can complete its work safely and effectively.

Use of chemical weapons by any party, including non-state actors, is equally grave and poses a challenge to the Convention. Ways to tackle this issue and come to practicable solutions should continue to be examined in the open-ended Working

Group on terrorism, under the able chairmanship of Nigeria, which should continue reporting on this subject to the Executive Council.

Mr Chairman,

We will never tire of stressing the importance of upholding the global norm against the use of chemical weapons. In this vein, we call on the Syrian Arab Republic to take the necessary measures to ensure that its chemical weapons programme is completely and irreversibly dismantled. This includes the destruction of the remaining CW Production Facilities, which has faced considerable delays and is now substantially behind schedule. The acceleration of the destruction process is more than necessary.

We continue to be particularly concerned with the insufficient information provided by the Syrian authorities regarding questions arising from the discrepancies and inconsistencies in their declarations and explanations to the Technical Secretariat. What was the fate of the 2000 bombs that Syria claims to have converted, as we don't believe that the Convention allows such conversion? What really happened to the ricin? What was the actual role of the SSRC in the Syrian chemical programme? The EU is in particular concerned about the possibility that Syria may still hold chemical weapons materials and alarmed by scientific findings that raise the question of the existence of a hitherto undeclared chemical weapons agent by Syria. The terms of Syria's accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention, specifically Article IV paragraph 8, provide a firm basis to support our demand that the Syrian Arab Republic must provide cooperation, credible answers and conclusive and credible evidence to support the assurances that it has fully abandoned its chemical weapons programme and in this way ensure sufficient confidence. We commend the Declaration Assessment Team of the Technical Secretariat for its work on this important issue and we look forward to future reports on its activities and any progress made. Given the open issues, the EU expects that the Executive Council will continue to monitor the situation in Syria as well as to meet at the established frequency, remaining seized of the matter.

I would like to reiterate our statement at the 75th and subsequent EC sessions as well as at the 19th CSP, where we drew the attention to the decision of the Council of the European Union, dated 10th February 2014. This decision introduced a derogation to the restrictive measures against the Syrian Arab Republic, so that, if Syria chooses, frozen assets belonging to the Syrian Central Bank or to Syrian

public entities may be paid on behalf of the Syrian Arab Republic to the OPCW for the destruction of Syrian chemical weapons and related verification activities. This includes destruction of the remaining CW Production Facilities and activities connected to the verification missions of the Technical Secretariat. We have been informed that Syria will not consent to allow the use of frozen assets in this way. The EU wishes to recall therefore that in line with the Convention, it is the responsibility of the Government of Syria to pay these costs, as specified in Article IV paragraph 16 of the CWC. We call on Syria to respect the CWC and take full responsibility of all its obligations towards the OPCW. In this context, it is important to state that the EU will not accept that the Trust Fund is used to pay verification costs as requested by the Syrian authorities.

I would like to add for colleague's information that there is also an EU humanitarian exception for the use of the Syrian frozen assets.

In closing, I would like to request that this statement be circulated as an official document of this meeting of the Council and be published on the OPCW website and extranet.

Thank you Mr Chairman.