

**Statement on behalf of the European Union
delivered by H.E. Maris Klisans
Permanent Representative of Latvia to the OPCW
at the Forty-Ninth meeting of the Executive Council
(The Hague, 7 May 2015)**

Mr. Chairperson,

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

The candidate countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Albania, Iceland, the country of the Stabilization and Association process and potential candidate country Bosnia and Herzegovina, the EFTA country Norway , as well as Andorra, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

Mr. Chairperson,

Since this is the last Executive Council meeting under your chairmanship, I would like to express our deepest appreciation for the exemplary way that you have steered the work of the EC with great professionalism and in a constructive and conciliatory manner.

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 organisation and the Syria CW operation in particularly challenging circumstances.

Mr. Chairperson,

Despite the considerable progress achieved regarding the near destruction of the Syrian declared chemical weapons and Production Facilities, we are obliged to convene again in an extraordinary meeting as too many uncertainties persist regarding the irreversible dismantling of the Syrian CW program, notably the

proven use of chlorine as a weapon and the veracity and completeness of the Syrian Declarations.

Mr. Chairperson,

One of the very reasons that our Executive Council meets today is related to the fact that there have been several reports, that chlorine attacks have taken place in the North of Syria, in the region of Idlib. And what is terrible and should be considered as a reminder of this Organisation's duty is the fact that those reports continued after the adoption of Resolution 2209 by the UNSC on 6 March, including a serious fatal attack on March 16th, and have kept coming since then. The EU expresses serious concern about this ongoing and unacceptable situation. It then becomes even more tragic to realise that, as we commemorated the 100th anniversary of the first large scale use of chemical weapons, these reports of alleged use mention the same chemical agent that was used during the battle of Ieper.

The alarming reports of the Fact Finding Mission stated that "it has found information constituting 'compelling confirmation' that a toxic chemical was used "systematically and repeatedly" "as a weapon". The reports also refer to testimonies that these chemicals have been dropped from helicopters, an asset that only the Syrian government possesses. The seriousness of the findings led to the adoption of an historic decision by the EC at its 48th extraordinary meeting and subsequently of Resolution 2209 by the UNSC condemning the use of chlorine as a chemical weapon in Syria. As appropriate, this Resolution made it clear that the use of chlorine is a violation of the international law and of resolution 2118 and reaffirmed that the UNSC will impose sanctions under Chapter VII in case of new use of chemical weapons.

The EU reiterates its condemnation of the use of chlorine as a chemical weapon by the Assad regime, which constitutes a blatant violation of international law and may amount to war crime and a crime against humanity. The EU also stresses that those responsible for these illegal acts must be held accountable. In this respect, the EU fully supports the decision of the Director-General to have the FFM continue its work. The EU also considers it very important that the DG brief the UN SC on the findings of the FFM in coordination with the SG as necessary, pursuant to UN SC Resolution 2118. While lauding the professionalism and commitment of the members of the FFM, we call all parties in the Syrian Arab Republic to extend

their full cooperation to the FFM and to ensure that it carries out its work safely and effectively.

Moreover, we express concern over allegations transmitted by the Syrian government in December 2014 regarding possible use of chlorine or other chemicals as a weapon by non-state actors. The EU's position is clear: just as for those concerning the Idlib region, these allegations should be examined and elucidated by the FFM and the EC should be duly informed there-of. It is therefore very troubling to us to see Syria prevent the Technical Secretariat from doing its work by not allowing a FFM team to come to Damascus to investigate those allegations. The Syrian government cannot pretend to be willing to fight terrorist groups while it refuses to allow the FFM to do its work independently with professionalism and integrity. Once again, we call on the Syrian Arab Republic to provide full cooperation to the OPCW, as it is up to the Syrian government to build confidence.

Mr Chairperson,

We cannot but reiterate our concern with the insufficient information provided by the Syrian authorities regarding questions arising from the discrepancies and inconsistencies in their initial declaration and explanations to the Technical Secretariat. Despite expressing similar concerns in previous meetings, the list of discrepancies remains long; these are not trivial book keeping issues. They are matters of substance. Lack of original documentation, the fate of the 2000 bombs that Syria claims to have converted, the various questions concerning a ricin programme, the actual role of the SSRC in the Syrian chemical programme, the lack of information about small calibre ordnance and, last but not least, the recent finding of the DAT, showing traces of precursors of VX and sarin were found on a site where they were not supposed to be, figure high in that list. The EU is in particularly concerned that, due to all the above, Syria may still hold chemical weapons materials or undeclared chemical weapons agents. In this vein, we call on the Syrian Arab Republic to take the necessary measures to provide sufficient confidence that it does not retain offensive chemical weapons capabilities and that its chemical weapons program is completely and irreversibly dismantled.

At this juncture, we commend the Declaration Assessment Team of the Technical Secretariat for its work on this important issue and we underscore that the Executive Council needs to continue to monitor the situation in Syria as well as to remain seized of the matter.

Once again, the EU is obliged to stress that the Syrian Arab Republic, as a State Party to the Chemical Weapons Convention, is responsible for meeting the costs arising in connection with the elimination of its chemical weapons program and the verification thereof. We call on Syria to respect the Convention and fully meet all its obligations as specified in Article IV paragraph 16 of the CWC. Syria should take advantage of the EU proposal to use the Syrian "frozen assets" to this end, a proposal that Syria has rejected previously. In the same context, it is important to reiterate that the EU will not accept that the Trust Fund be used to pay verification costs as requested by the Syrian authorities.

Finally, I seize this opportunity to inform this Council that the contract regarding the new EU Council decision for the years 2015-16, has been signed with the TS at the end of March. Thus, the implementation of this Decision of a value of 2, 54 million EUR can start with immediate effect, benefitting activities such as promoting universality, national implementation, international cooperation, the Africa Programme and taking stock from lessons learned from the Syrian operation. I recall that this Council Decision is the sixth voluntary contribution of the EU to OPCW activities since 2005 and constitutes a token of continuous support and recognition of the important work carried out by the organisation

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 extranet.

Thank you Mr Chairperson.