

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY



STATEMENT BY

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United States Delegation to the Executive Council
Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons
The Fifty-First Meeting of the Executive Council
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Mr. Chairman,

It has been quite a while since the Executive Council focused on the destruction of the chemical weapons stockpiles declared by Libya. When the destruction of the munitions containing mustard agent was completed in May 2014, we all breathed a sigh of relief. We were assured that Libya was on track to meet its planned completion date of December 2016 for destruction of the remaining chemicals, and the issue receded from our collective attention.

But now the situation has changed and the Council needs to consider what action to take. Without effective international assistance, it appears that Libya will not be able to meet the planned destruction date. In the light of the current situation in Libya, it is extremely important to explore alternatives to the current national plan for destruction. In a letter on February 12, 2016, the Libyan National Authority requested that the Director-General consider the option of transporting the four remaining chemicals to a waste disposal facility outside Libya in order to dispose of them as early as possible.

As an initial response to these letters, the Director-General has put before the Council a draft decision that would request him, in coordination with States Parties, to identify and evaluate the technical, operational, financial, security, and legal factors relevant to all the options for destroying Libya's remaining chemicals, including removal and destruction outside of Libya, and options for in-country destruction. The Director-General would be requested to submit a report to the next regular session of the Council, which begins in three weeks. States Parties would be asked to consider providing in-kind or financial contributions to assist Libya.

Mr. Chairman,

The United States believes that the proposed decision is both prudent and responsive to the concerns expressed in the letter by the Libyan National Authority. We fully support its adoption by the Council today and we will assist the Director-General in every possible way to conduct a thorough study.

The incoming Libyan government is confronting a real dilemma – and, as a result, the OPCW is as well. What course will best enable Libya to meet the requirements of the Chemical Weapons Convention? And to do so as safely, securely, and in the most environmentally sound manner? Destruction is – and must remain – Libya's responsibility, but the OPCW and its Member States can and should be willing to assist Libya in achieving this important goal.

Answering the questions I just raised is far from easy. The two main approaches – destruction in-country and destruction outside of Libya – or a hybrid of the two are simple to state, but

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could be very difficult to implement in practice. The United States recognizes the urgency of the situation, as expressed by Libya, and we support addressing this situation as quickly and wisely as possible. Finding the best approach will require a very careful weighing of many factors - some practical, some legal, and some political. By receiving the answers to our questions, the Council can base its decisions on factual assessments and detailed evaluations by experts. We are hopeful that the expedited answers and assessments envisioned by the draft decision before us today will assist capitals in reaching a consensus as quickly as possible.

In evaluating possible courses of action, the United States believes that in order to reach a prudent decision on how to move forward, all of us need to think very clearly about the security, legal, political, technical and operational factors involved. For example, what is the possibility for loss of control over the chemicals, either in their current location or during transport? Are there ways to minimize these risks? What are the risks presented by each of the chemicals? Is there a way to minimize their usefulness as precursors or their proliferation risk once readied for transport? Are some chemicals more important from a security standpoint than others? We are relieved that the chemical that perhaps posed the greatest risk - the nerve agent soman precursor pinacolyl alcohol - has recently been destroyed. We congratulate the Libyan government for carrying out this important task in difficult circumstances.

In our view, the overall proliferation and security risk presented by the remaining four chemicals is of concern. That said, we must keep in mind that these chemicals pose differing risks. Consequently, they do not necessarily have to be treated in the same way. For example, one chemical - tributylamine - which amounts to approximately thirty-four per cent of the stocks, is not even a precursor. It is used either as a stabilizer for agent or to remove acid produced as a byproduct during CW agent production. Thus, we do not consider that extraordinary measures are needed in respect to tributylamine.

Mr. Chairman,

The United States does not reject any option as a matter of principle and will consider very carefully the report to be made by the Director-General as a result of the proposed decision.

I request that this statement be considered an official document of this special meeting of the Executive Council.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.