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SOUTH AFRICA

**STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE AFRICAN GROUP OF STATES PARTIES
TO THE CHEMICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION AT THE
SIXTEENTH SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES**

Mr Chairperson,

1. On behalf of the African Group, I would like to congratulate you on your election as Chairperson of the Sixteenth Session of the Conference of the States Parties. We are confident that you will steer our work to a successful conclusion and we assure you of our full cooperation and support for your efforts.
2. I am also pleased to convey the African Group's appreciation to the outgoing Chairperson, Ambassador Roberto Palomo Silva of Guatemala, for his commitment and hard work as Chairperson of the Fifteenth Session of the Conference of States Parties.
3. The African Group of States Parties associates itself with the statement made on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and China by the Permanent Representative of Cuba.
4. We also wish to extend our welcome to Ambassador Grace Asirwatham who is attending her first Session of the Conference of the States Parties as the Deputy Director-General of the Organisation and wish to express a word of appreciation to her for the contribution she is already making in the activities of the Organisation.
5. The Group has also taken note of the opening statement by the Director-General on the activities of the Organisation and wishes to express its appreciation for the professional manner in which he manages the affairs of the Organisation.
6. The African Group will address two primary issues, which are of particular interest, during this statement. These are the issues that relate to the challenges that confront the Organisation and the States Parties that will continue to possess stockpiles of chemical weapons after the 29 April 2012 final extended deadline. Related issues of concern are the situations with regard to old chemical weapons and abandoned chemical weapons. The second that the African Group will address in this statement



is the importance of the Convention's obligation to promote the peaceful application of chemistry.

7. The African Group reiterates its positions on the following issues:
 - Universality of the Convention;
 - The importance of reaching an agreement on the programme and budget for the Organisation that has been proposed by the Director-General for 2012;
 - The continued implementation of the Programme for Africa by the Technical Secretariat;
 - The implementation of national obligations and national implementation measures in accordance with Article VII of the Convention;
 - The implementation of Article X and its provisions relating to assistance and protection against chemical weapons;
 - The development of agreed concrete measures and recommendations to ensure the full, effective and non-discriminatory implementation of Article XI;
 - The role that the OPCW can play in the fight against terrorism;
 - The need for equitable geographical and gender representation in the professional ranks of the Organisation, particularly in the senior and management cadres;
 - The application of a tenure policy that would allow the Director-General and the Technical Secretariat to execute the programmes and activities of the Organisation;
 - The consultations that are taking place on the future role of the Organisation; and
 - On the improved and effective functioning of the Executive Council.
8. The African Group has taken note of the presentations and reports that have been made by the States Parties concerned, since the Fifteenth Session of the Conference, on the destruction of chemical weapons stockpiles, of old chemical weapons and of abandoned chemical weapons, and would like to commend these States Parties on the progress that they have made. We, however remain concerned at the prospect that the 29 April 2012 deadline will not be met. The African States Parties believe that the destruction of all chemical weapons is one of the core objectives of this Organisation, not least because of the fact that the continued existence and/or re-emergence of chemical weapons is a threat to international peace and security.
9. The African Group is satisfied at the decision that was taken by the Thirty-First Meeting of the Executive Council, in which it recommended to the Conference of the States Parties a decision regarding the final extended deadline of 29 April 2012. The African Group believes that by working together the States Parties will ensure that the Convention achieves its objectives to address the challenges that confront us. A failure by the Convention to achieve the set goals would not only be a setback for the disarmament and non-proliferation of chemical weapons, but also a drawback in our common objective of eliminating the threat posed by all weapons of mass destruction.
10. The recommended decision will ensure that we utilise the mechanisms that are contained in the Convention to address the issue and to ensure that the scourge of chemical weapons is eliminated and that these weapons will never pose a threat again.

An inability of States Parties to address this situation in accordance with the Convention's provisions would undermine the credibility of the Convention and this would be an unacceptable situation.

11. The African Group believes the approach that was followed by the Chairperson of the Executive Council in preparing the draft decision and in piloting it through the Executive Council ensured that an agreement on a decision that was founded on the legal provisions of the Convention could be achieved. While we are concerned that meeting the final extended deadline remains a challenge, our belief is that a solution that ensures the destruction of the remaining chemical weapons takes place under the provisions of the Convention has been found. The African Group supports the proposed decision of the Executive Council, which had been prepared by its Chairperson, and would commend its adoption by the Conference of the States Parties.
12. The African Group has also taken note of the work of the Executive Council with regard to the Libyan concerns about the security of the chemical weapons stockpile in Libya and their request for OPCW assistance. The African Group is satisfied with the adoption of the decision by the Thirtieth Meeting of the Executive Council on the extension of the Category 1 and Category 2 chemical weapons destruction deadlines for Libya until the final extended deadline of 29 April 2012 as requested by Libya. We are also encouraged by the recommencement of verification activities in November 2011 by the Technical Secretariat. We look forward to the Conference addressing the question of the extension of the deadline for Category 1 chemical weapons as was recommended by the Executive Council.
13. The African Group also believes that the issues of "abandoned chemical weapons" and of "old chemical weapons declared as of 2007" have to be addressed in accordance with the Convention. We welcome the reports to the Executive Council, indicating that the decisions on the destruction of these weapons in the run-up to 29 April 2012 will be adopted. We encourage these delegations involved to come forward with draft decisions in order for the next Executive Council to address these issues in a satisfactory way.
14. The obligation under the Convention to promote the peaceful application of chemistry should not be underestimated. Among the core objectives of the Convention, the implementation of chemical safety, security and other sustainable capacity building programmes are critical for the development of the African States Parties in order for them to derive optimum benefit. In this regard, the African Group would strongly oppose any initiatives to cut back on international cooperation and assistance resources.
15. A Convention that serves the interests of all States Parties will contribute to international peace and security that is not threatened by existence of chemical weapons as opposed to serving only the interests of certain States Parties. Serving the interests of some will undermine the Convention's goals, integrity and credibility. Any debate that tries to diminish the importance of the Convention in this regard or attempts to hold the negotiations hostage over the Organisation's work is therefore not in our interest. It is in this regard that the African Group will continue sharing the

burden of paying for the verification of chemical weapons destruction activities beyond the final extended deadline of 29 April 2012.

Mr Chairperson,

16. I thank you, and we would like to request that this statement be circulated as an official document of the Sixteenth Session of the Conference of the States Parties.

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