



National Statement delivered by Ambassador Thomas Schieb
Permanent Representative of the Federal Republic of Germany to the OPCW

At the 28th session of the Conference of the States Parties

Mr Chairman, Director-General,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me congratulate our Chairman, Ambassador Suljuk Mustansar Tarar of Pakistan, on his election as Chairperson of the 28th Conference of States Parties. My delegation assures you of our full support.

The year 2023, which marks the 30th anniversary of the signing of the CWC, is a very important year for the OPCW.

In July, the destruction of the declared chemical weapons stockpiles accumulated during the Cold War was completed. This is a huge success for global disarmament and for the OPCW. We commend the Director-General and the Technical Secretariat on their highly professional work in accompanying and verifying this process.

The 5th Review Conference in May, although not being able to adopt an outcome document, did create a certain momentum which helped States Parties move forward on a number of important issues. These so-called actionable matters included improving the institutional governance of the OPCW as well as adapting the industry verification regime in light of the rapidly developing global chemical industry.

Shortly before the Review Conference, the state of the art ChemTech Centre was inaugurated. It is a great asset and it will help ensure that the OPCW remains fit for purpose.

However, at the same time, the global norm against chemical weapons has remained under a lot of pressure.

Especially Syria's continuing non-compliance with the Convention is extremely concerning. More than 10 years after acceding the CWC, Syria continues to evade clarifying cases of use of chemical weapons as well as gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies of its initial declaration. Only very recently the TS again raised concerns about possibly undeclared quantities of chemical agents as well as additional undeclared chemical agents, which experts of the TS had discovered in facilities of the Syrian regime.

It took 2 ½ years for the technical consultations between the Syrian regime and the Declaration Assessment Team to resume in November. The dropping of objections by Syria to issue entry visa for OPCW inspectors has been long overdue and constitutes frankly a simple responsibility for a State Party. In the light of the more recent information coming from the TS it is difficult to believe that the Syrian side has any intention to engage seriously with the TS. Rather, we see Syria continuing with its delaying tactics.

In January, the OPCW's Inspection and Investigation Team issued a report that found the Syrian regime responsible for a deadly chemical attack on the Syrian town Douma in April 2018, killing 43 individuals and affecting dozens more. This is the ninth instance of chemical weapons use independently attributed to the Syrian regime by UN and OPCW mechanisms since Syria joined the CWC in 2013.

We have to conclude: Syria's capability and demonstrated willingness to use chemical weapons remain a threat to international security and stability.

For us States Parties it would be highly irresponsible to turn a blind eye to Syria's behaviour. We have to continue to keep pressure on Syria to fulfil its obligations.

What makes matters worse is that also non-state actors constitute a continuing threat to the CWC, as shown by ISIS's use of chemical weapons in Syria and Iraq.

In order to uphold the integrity of the Convention, we must address the continued threat of CW use both by Syria and other actors, including non-state actors. This is why we very much support the adoption of a decision by the CSP, which would help prohibit and prevent the transfer of toxic chemicals to Syria. We call on States Parties to support and co-sponsor this important decision.

Chair,

Germany deplores Russia's reckless military attacks in the direct vicinity of civil chemical facilities in Ukraine. We condemn any act compromising the safety of these facilities and reiterate the utmost importance of safeguarding them in order to prevent dangerous substances and materials being released. Germany welcomes the OPCW's monitoring of the situation, particularly around declared chemical industry sites in Ukraine.

Germany is also very concerned by reports, including from Russian state media, that the Russian Federation, a sitting member of the Executive Council, is using riot control agents as a method of warfare in its war of aggression against Ukraine, thus violating the CWC. At the July and October Executive Council meetings, we requested the Russian Federation to comment on and respond to these reports. Unfortunately, the responses we received from the Russian Federation so far are absolutely insufficient to alleviate our concerns. More than that, the Russian Federation has insinuated that Germany was somehow involved in these incidents and should be the one providing information. We reject such absurd insinuations and we again ask Russia to clarify the matter immediately, and strictly fulfil its obligations under the CWC.

When it comes to the Novichok attacks on Alexei Navalny and the Skripals, the overwhelming evidence points to direct responsibility of the Russian state, amounting to further Russian violations of its CWC obligations. Yet Russia continues to deny responsibility for the attacks and ignores all calls for investigating these cases.

This non-cooperative behaviour seems to follow a pattern, a pattern that leaves no room for any other interpretation than that Russia is trying to cover up its breaches of the CWC. Considering this, it is understandable that countries of the Eastern European Group do no longer want to be represented by Russia in the Executive Council.

Chair,

To do justice to the important role of the Convention in contributing to global disarmament, States Parties should provide the necessary resources to the OPCW, its implementing body. This is why we support the proposed biennial programme and budget for 2024/25. The OPCW must remain capable to fulfil its responsibilities, to investigate alleged use, conduct challenge inspections and render technical assistance. Valuable expertise gained in the Syrian investigations needs to be retained.

Chair,

With the destruction of all declared chemical weapons stockpiles completed this year, the OPCW has fulfilled an important part of its mandate. However, the role of the OPCW in upholding the norm against the use of chemical weapons and in fighting the re-emergence of chemical weapons, respectively, will remain significant.

In this context, the ever faster developments in science and technology pose enormous challenges to the OPCW in implementing the CWC. In order to be up to the job, the OPCW should benefit as much as possible from the work, experiences and research of the science community and other external stakeholders like the chemical industry and specific civil society organisations.

With this in mind, and building on discussions we had in the run-up and during RC-5, the Permanent Representations of Ecuador and Germany have started informal consultations on how to improve interaction with civil society in a broader sense. Counting on States Parties' continued engagement and support, we do hope to be able to present some promising options in this respect in due time.

Let me end by stressing that Germany remains strongly committed to upholding the norm against the use of chemical weapons and to fight against their re-emergence.

We kindly request that this statement be designated an official document of this Conference session and posted on both the external server and the public website.