



**STATEMENT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION
BY H.E. AMBASSADOR MARJOLIJN VAN DEELEN
SPECIAL ENVOY FOR DISARMAMENT AND NON-PROLIFERATION
EUROPEAN EXTERNAL ACTION SERVICE
AT THE 28th SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF STATES PARTIES TO THE
CHEMICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION**

(The Hague, 27 November – 1 December 2023)

Agenda item 8 - General debate

Mr. Chairperson,
Mr. Director-General,
Distinguished delegates,

I have the honour of speaking on behalf of the European Union.

The Candidate Countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Republic of Moldova, Montenegro and Ukraine as well as the EFTA (European Free Trade Association) countries Iceland and Liechtenstein, members of the EEA (European Economic Area) align themselves with this statement. Andorra, Monaco and San Marino also associate themselves with this statement.

The European Union (EU) pays tribute to Ambassador Vusimuzi Madonsela of South Africa, Chairperson of the 27th Conference of States Parties, and Ambassador Lucian Fătu of Romania, Chairperson of the Executive Council, for their efforts and outstanding performance in fulfilling their duties. We also warmly congratulate Ambassador Suljuk Mustansar Tarar of Pakistan for his election as the Chairperson of the 28th Conference of States Parties. I would like to assure him of our full support in steering the work of the Conference.

Mr. Chairperson,

October 14th marked the tenth anniversary of Syria's accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention. However, ten years after, we cannot but deplore the fact that the Syrian regime still has not complied with its obligations under the Convention. This prolonged non-compliance causes serious damage to the objective and purpose of the Convention and requires further collective measures by the Conference to address the situation.

The Syrian Arab Republic has repeatedly used chemical weapons over the past years, causing numerous victims, as substantiated by comprehensive and thorough investigations carried out by the UN and OPCW. Last August we commemorated the sad tenth anniversary of the Ghouta chemical attack perpetrated by the Syrian regime, killing more than 1.400 people. We again urge the Syrian regime to fully declare and destroy its chemical weapons stockpiles and programme in accordance with its obligations under UN Resolution 2118 and the CWC.

Mr. Chairperson,

The European Union reiterates its resolute condemnation of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, which constitutes a manifest violation of the UN Charter, and reaffirms the European Union's unwavering support for Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders and its inherent right of self-defence against the Russian aggression. In the face of Russia's efforts to target civilian infrastructures and inflict immense suffering on the people of Ukraine, the European Union will continue to provide strong support to Ukraine for as long as it takes.

This illegal aggression undermines the international rules-based order and multilateralism. Furthermore, following the poisoning of the Skripals and Mr. Alexei Navalny with the nerve agent of the "Novichok" group, for which there can be no other plausible explanation than a Russian involvement and responsibility, we are strongly concerned that Russia may be using Riot Control Agents at the front in Ukraine. Russian TV reporting claims how successful such "smoking out Ukrainian fighters" is. When asked about these RCA incidents pursuant to Article IX, paragraph 2 of the Convention, Russia provided a dubious answer and tried to make us believe that, somehow, those asking were owing Russia an explanation. This callous treatment of the Convention is worrying and illustrative for why the EU Member States fully support the candidatures of Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine for the Executive Council. Russia's invasion of Ukraine is, no doubt, the important regional factor that the Conventions foresees

for consideration in designations for Executive Council Membership, alongside with security interests and the size of chemical industry.

Mr. Chairperson,

The European Union is ready to build on the positive progress achieved in the Fifth Review Conference, and continue work on all actionable items to keep the Technical Secretariat fit for purpose. The high turnover rate underlines the need for amending the OPCW Tenure Policy by bringing it in line with those of other comparable international organisations. It is of key importance to find practical solutions to help maintain key expertise required to ensure the continued implementation of the Convention. Equally important is to continue work with a view to improving the geographical diversity in full respect of the Convention, and without micromanaging the Technical Secretariat. We commend the efforts and leadership by New Zealand and Panama as well as Chile in taking work forward in these parallel work strands.

The EU strongly believes that, whilst respecting the paramount consideration of competence, efficiency and integrity as enshrined in the Convention, gender equality and mainstreaming of a gender perspective are and should continue to be an integral part of the work of the OPCW and implementation of the CWC. A wide diversity of views is essential for decision-making and in helping us tackle the challenges we face with greater effectiveness. We commend the Director-General and the Technical Secretariat for the work they have carried out thus far and look forward to further progress towards gender equality in the Organisation, including through the enhancement of gender mainstreaming in all areas of the Technical Secretariat's work.

I would like to reiterate the importance of engaging all relevant stakeholders, ranging from chemical industry to think tanks, civil society organisations and non-governmental organisations, in the OPCW work, and their meaningful and broadest possible participation in the Conference of States Parties. The European Union welcomes the ongoing work steered by Ecuador and Germany and invites States Parties to contribute to these reflections with a view to enhanced interaction with Civil Society.

Mr. Chairperson,

The European Union supports the Director-General's proposed revision of the Programme and Budget for 2024-25 that enables the OPCW to continue its vital work including cooperation

and assistance projects. We call upon all States Parties to pay their assessed contributions in full and on time.

The EU will spare no effort to continue to promote the full and effective implementation of the Convention, as well as its universalisation. As a concrete sign of our commitment, I am pleased to confirm a new voluntary contribution of EUR 5.3 million in support of the OPCW activities until 2026. This contribution helps to finance key activities such as capacity building and laboratory twinning as well as the organisation of the first Table-Top Exercise (TTX) on chemical terrorism.

Finally, we seize this opportunity to commend the leadership of OPCW Director-General, Ambassador Fernando Arias, and reiterate our full confidence in the OPCW Technical Secretariat (TS), its professionalism, impartiality and well-established technical expertise in implementing the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and tasks assigned by the States Parties.

In October 2023, the United Nations General Assembly First Committee reaffirmed its strong support for the Chemical Weapons Convention and the OPCW in the resolution on the implementation of the Convention prepared annually by Poland. This is an unequivocal expression of support to and importance of the work the OPCW is performing across the regions to the benefit of all States Parties.

I would kindly ask you to consider this statement as an official document of the Twenty-Eight Session of the Conference of the States Parties and post it on the OPCW external server and public website.

Thank you.

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