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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

**STATEMENT BY ROSE E. GOTTEMOELLER
UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AT THE
NINETEENTH SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES**

Madam Chairperson, Mr Director-General, distinguished delegates,

On behalf of the U.S. delegation, I congratulate you and extend a warm welcome and a pledge of our support for your efforts at this Conference.

I would also like to express our appreciation to the Director-General, Ambassador Ahmet Üzümcü, and to all of the staff of the Technical Secretariat. The many successes this Organisation has achieved over the past year, since the receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize, are the result of his leadership and of the dedication and superlative efforts of the staff of the Technical Secretariat. The prize was clearly a testament to the value of this great Organisation.

There are a number of important issues that I will address today — U.S. destruction efforts, universality, national implementation, and OPCW knowledge retention — but I will begin with the most pressing issue before this Conference – the Syria chemical weapons situation. The removal and destruction effort implemented by an international coalition was intended to bring an end to the threat of Syrian chemical weapons.

Although major progress has been made over the last year in eliminating the Syrian chemical weapons programme, serious concerns remain as to whether Syria has declared and destroyed all aspects of that programme. Problems in Syria's very declaration call into question its accuracy and completeness. We are also profoundly skeptical of the Syrian claim that no records exist to corroborate its declaration. Last April, in an effort to meet the treaty responsibility to verify the accuracy and completeness of the Syrian declaration, the Director-General established a Declaration Assessment Team to consult directly with the Syrian Government. The Declaration Assessment Team has now conducted five rounds of consultations with Syria. Of significance, in October, the Declaration Assessment Team detailed in a status report to the Executive Council a substantial number of unresolved issues and concerns.

The Conference should be fundamentally concerned about the information that this report reveals. In sum, the Technical Secretariat has been unable to verify that all of the chemicals, munitions, and facilities that comprised the Syria chemical weapons programme have been declared and, as required by the Convention and United Nations Security Council resolution



2118 (2013), eliminated. Indeed, chemical weapons capabilities may very well remain in the hands of the Syrian Government.

We strongly support the continuing efforts of the Director-General and his Declaration Assessment Team to resolve the remaining issues and concerns. We look forward to an updated report to the Executive Council in January 2015, after the results of the most recent discussions have been fully evaluated.

Although the discrepancies in Syria's declaration raise serious concerns regarding its compliance with the Convention, an even more pressing compliance concern with the Chemical Weapons Convention is the continued use of chemical weapons by the Syrian Government against the people of Syria. In its second report, issued in September 2014, the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission presented a compelling set of key-findings and conclusions from witnesses' and victims' accounts and other evidence. We have no doubt that these findings and conclusions point to the Syrian Government's use of chemical weapons in attacks against opposition-controlled towns in northern Syria during April and May of this year. In particular, the witnesses and victims' accounts which invariably link the attacks with the presence of helicopters, unequivocally point to the Syrian Government as the perpetrator of the attacks. There are indications such attacks occurred again in August and September and the Fact-Finding Mission is now addressing them. These recent allegations bear a strong resemblance to those that are now confirmed as having been chemical attacks.

In his statement to the Executive Council on 26 September 2014, the Director-General captured the gravity of this affront to the Convention by stating, "It is a tragic irony that a hundred years after chlorine was first used on the battlefield, its misuse to kill and terrorise unarmed civilians has again raised its ugly head." He cautioned the Council that "the OPCW must show zero tolerance for any actions that threaten the norm against the use of any chemical as a weapon." Regrettably, the Executive Council has been unable to reach consensus on condemning the Syrian Government's continued use of chemical weapons and holding it accountable under the Convention.

Though this Conference, like the Council, may remain silent in the face of these attacks against the people of Syria, the United States of America lends its voice to the statement of the like-minded group introduced on 10 October. We are resolute that Syria be held accountable, that the verification regime for Syria be strengthened, that a concerted effort be made to treat and assist the victims of Syrian chemical attacks, and that action be taken to deter and prevent further attacks on the people of Syria.

Before turning to other issues facing this Conference, let me make some cautionary remarks about the Syria situation. It is essential that the Conference not forget that Syria joined the Convention last year under extraordinary circumstances. The reports of the OPCW Declaration Assessment Team and that of the Fact-Finding Mission are a stark reminder that those extraordinary circumstances remain, necessitating continued oversight and scrutiny by this Conference, the Executive Council, and the international community. Put bluntly, Syria is not just like other States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention. Its decision to accede to the Convention was not an enlightened renunciation of chemical weapons, but was a decision born solely of expediency. Just weeks before it submitted its letter of accession last year, the Assad regime, on 21 August 2013, used chemical weapons against an opposition-controlled suburb of Damascus, in attacks killing more than one thousand four hundred people. Now there is compelling evidence that Syria continues to use chemical

weapons systematically and repeatedly. Today, Syria is subject to a special mandate established by the 27 September 2013 decision of the Executive Council and by United Nations Security Council resolution 2118 (2013). Syria must remain under this special mandate until these chemical weapons attacks cease, until those responsible are held accountable, and until the Syrian Government is completely disarmed of its chemical weapons. In 2015, we expect special meetings of the Executive Council for this purpose to continue, beginning with a meeting in January.

I am pleased to report that U.S. efforts remain on track to destroy the remaining ten percent of our chemical weapons stockpile. The United States of America continues to make steady, measurable progress toward the complete elimination of our stockpile, and we remain fully committed to completing chemical weapons destruction as safely and quickly as practicable. In accordance with the decision of the Conference in December 2011, the United States of America is fully committed to transparency, and as such, we will provide a detailed report on our efforts later in the Conference and host an Executive Council visit to our Pueblo facility in March 2015.

With respect to the other possessor States, we welcome the transparency that the Russian Federation has demonstrated with respect to the destruction challenges it has encountered and the resulting revision to its planned completion date. Regarding the Category 2 chemicals remaining in Libya, we encourage the Libyan Government, as a matter of priority, to implement destruction plans for the chemicals of greatest concern, while ensuring that the remaining chemicals are safely stored pending destruction.

There is much to be done to prepare for the post-destruction era and the challenges that it will present. I would like to commend Australia for drawing the attention of States Parties to one such issue – the concern about the use of certain chemicals for law enforcement purposes. We share the concern that an illicit chemical weapons programme could be concealed under the guise of a legitimate treaty purpose, such as law enforcement. The United States of America supports Australia's call for an active dialogue on this issue and for clear statements from Chemical Weapons Convention States Parties about their own national policies. In this connection I want to reiterate that the United States of America is not developing, producing, stockpiling, or using incapacitating chemical agents.

The achievement of universal membership in the Chemical Weapons Convention remains a fundamental objective of the United States of America. Over the past year, unfortunately, there have been no new members with six States still remaining outside the Convention. Several States appear to be nearing a decision to join the Convention — we welcome Myanmar's statement to this conference in this regard. It will be a priority for the United States of America in 2015 to continue our outreach to those States, urging them to join as rapidly as possible.

There is another kind of problem that the Convention continues to face regarding global implementation and adherence. To date, less than one-half of the States Parties have fully implemented the national measures required under Article VII. This includes fifteen States Parties that have declared chemical industry facilities and that undergo OPCW inspections. Many others have not put into place the penal legislation intended by the Convention to deny terrorists access to toxic chemicals and related weapons technologies. This situation is unacceptable and must be remedied.

In connection with national implementation, I want to underscore the importance of full, effective, and non-discriminatory implementation of Article XI. No country does more than the United States of America to promote free trade in chemicals and to further international cooperation and exchange of scientific and technical information in the field of chemical activities for purposes not prohibited under this Convention. The U.S. Government organises and funds a wide variety of programmes that help to build Article XI-related capacity in participating countries. For example, the United States of America partnered with the OPCW to convene here a “Symposium on Bridging International Gaps in Chemical Security” one week ago.

Unlike other aspects of the Convention, however, there is a plurality of views regarding how to promote Article XI within the framework of the Convention. Revisiting issues that members of this Conference have already repeatedly considered and on which consensus clearly cannot be reached is not helpful in advancing a common approach to Article XI. It would be far better to build on areas of agreement, in particular the components of an agreed framework for the full implementation of Article XI that were approved by the Conference of the States Parties three years ago. The United States of America is encouraged by the agreement reached at the last session of the Executive Council to “achieve concrete outcomes” related to Article XI. We stand ready to collaborate in this effort by building upon our areas of agreement.

The effectiveness that the Technical Secretariat has demonstrated in recent years - in both its routine verification activities as well as in the extraordinary efforts related to Syria – has been based on the efforts of a highly skilled and experienced cadre of inspectors. Unfortunately, this expertise is dwindling rapidly. Many of the most experienced experts have left the Secretariat. The ongoing Syria chemical weapons situation is a harsh reminder of the continuing need for a high level of expertise. What will the world do in the future to address chemical weapons threats if the Technical Secretariat devolves into a hollow organisation devoid of experience and expertise? In years to come, the world will continue to look to the OPCW as the repository of technical knowledge on chemical weapons threats. It is the obligation of all States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention to ensure that the Technical Secretariat has the expertise and resources it needs to perform this vital role. We urge this Conference to approve specific measures to preserve the expertise and experience of the Technical Secretariat.

The OPCW will face many challenges in the years to come to achieve the promise of a world free of chemical weapons. We must achieve universal membership; we must achieve fully effective implementation; we must counter the threat of chemical terrorism; we must prevent the re-emergence of chemical weapons. Indeed, we must ensure that the OPCW remains the preminent repository of the technical expertise and the political will to confront and surmount each of these challenges.

But first, we must successfully face the greatest challenge ever to the global norm against chemical weapons. We meet here today under the very shadow of the first use of chemical weapons by a State Party to the Convention, the Syrian Arab Republic. There can be no greater affront to the Convention than the actual use of chemical weapons. The challenge of eliminating Syria's chemical weapons programme remains and, for the sake of the people of Syria, we must finish what we started a year ago. Chemical weapons are an abomination and are repugnant to the conscience of mankind. All States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention must work together and take the necessary steps to ensure the Syrian Arab

Republic's full compliance with the Convention. If we do not hold the Syrian Government accountable for its actions, history will someday hold us accountable for our inaction.

Thank you, Madam Chairperson. I request that this document be circulated as an official document of the Conference and posted to the public website and to the external server.

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