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TUNISIA

**STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR MOHAMED KARIM BEN BECHER
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF TUNISIA TO THE OPCW
AT THE NINETEENTH SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES**

Madam Chairperson, Excellency Vesela Mrđen Korać,
Mr Director-General,
Madam Deputy Director-General,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

To begin, Madam Chairperson, I should like to extend to you, on behalf of the Tunisian Government and my delegation, my heartfelt congratulations for your election as Chairperson of the Nineteenth Session of the Conference of the States Parties. I am convinced that your substantial diplomatic experience will help to provide a clear direction for our work to make this conference a success.

I should also like to take this opportunity to express to the Conference my appreciation to your predecessor, Ambassador Sa'ad Abdul Majeed Ibrahim Al-Ali, the Permanent Representative of Iraq and Chairperson of the Eighteenth Session of the Conference of the States Parties, for his outstanding leadership of that session.

I would also like to congratulate His Excellency Ambassador Álvaro Moerzinger, the Permanent Representative of Uruguay and Chairperson of the Executive Council, and his predecessor, His Excellency Ambassador Olexander Horin, the Permanent Representative of Ukraine, who, in spite of a difficult situation marked by the intensity of Council meetings and many challenges, presided over the work of the Council in a wise and consensual manner.

Furthermore, I should like to take this opportunity to express my warmest thanks to our Director-General, His Excellency Ambassador Ahmet Üzümcü, for his comprehensive and insightful report to this session, and to the members of the Technical Secretariat for their unfailing professional dedication and the quality of their continued efforts to give greater visibility to our Organisation. Indeed, these efforts were acknowledged by the Nobel Committee, which honoured our Organisation by awarding it the Nobel Peace Prize in 2013.

In addition, I cannot pass up this opportunity to express my deepest gratitude to the Director-General for the warm welcome extended to our Minister of Foreign Affairs during his working visit to The Hague last September, and for the very useful meeting during which the Minister reiterated, on behalf of the Tunisian Government, his commitment to implementing the Convention and to cooperating with our Organisation.



My delegation, which aligns itself with the statements made by the African Group and the Non-Aligned Movement and China, wishes to speak on a number of issues that it considers to be relevant.

Tunisia, which in January 2014 adopted a new constitution and has just successfully held free and transparent legislative elections, as well as the first round of presidential elections, is increasingly committed to and driven by the values of peace and security in the world. These values, which are a cornerstone of Tunisian foreign policy, are enshrined in the relevant provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention (“the Convention”), to which my country has been a State Party since the establishment of the OPCW in 1997. It is in this spirit that my delegation reiterates its unwavering commitment to fulfilling the obligations arising from its membership in the OPCW, and to remaining actively engaged in the chemical disarmament process. I should also like to support the unconditional call to States remaining outside of the Convention to sign or ratify, without further delay, this single legal instrument aimed at eradicating one of the cruellest categories of weapons of mass destruction.

Overseeing the elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme, a mission that was entrusted to the OPCW on 27 September 2013 in accordance with mandates from the Executive Council and the United Nations Security Council, has been a landmark for our Organisation and, since that date, continues to be a topical issue within the OPCW, in view of the complete destruction of the Syrian chemical weapons arsenal. Tunisia maintains its strong position in support of the causes of chemical weapons disarmament and non-proliferation, and reiterates its unconditional support for the consensus-based decisions of the Executive Council, of which my country is once again a member since May 2014.

In this context, I pay tribute to the commendable efforts undertaken by the OPCW-UN Joint Mission in Syria headed by Ms Sigrid Kaag, and to the unfailing commitment of the Technical Secretariat under the aegis and sound leadership of the Director-General of the OPCW, who personally deserves our praise and gratitude. In this connection, we cannot but acknowledge the unprecedented cooperation within the international community aimed at achieving the objectives set out in the resolution of September 2013 to eliminate the Syrian chemical weapons arsenal.

My delegation wishes to express its complete willingness to work within the OPCW’s governing bodies, on the basis of consensus and in concert with all parties involved in the question of Syrian chemical weapons, in order to close this dossier once and for all.

Against this backdrop, I should like to present my heartfelt congratulations to Ambassador Medeiros for his recent appointment as the Director-General’s Special Adviser on Syria. I wish him every success in his new mission.

Within the framework of implementation of Article VII, Tunisia, which in 2007 adopted national legislation in application of the Convention, is ready to contribute to the steps that have been taken by the Technical Secretariat and certain States Parties that are in a position to do so, to provide technical assistance to any African States Parties that should request it.

Furthermore, my delegation encourages the Secretariat to search for innovative ways to provide assistance using a tailor-made approach that is capable of overcoming the practical difficulties and resource constraints encountered by different States Parties in carrying out their national implementation measures.

My delegation welcomes the continued implementation of the OPCW's Programme for Africa and advocates the development of new activities by the Technical Secretariat to strengthen that programme. In this context, Tunisia would be delighted to host at its National Institute for Physical and Chemical Research and Analysis (INRAP) events intended for African States Parties which fall within the framework of the programme, which would contribute greatly to the development of States Parties' national capacities.

My delegation welcomes the recent recruitment of two new Tunisian inspectors at the OPCW, and takes this opportunity to renew its appeal to increase within the Technical Secretariat the number of senior staff members from Africa, in the light of the number of African States Parties that are currently members of our Organisation.

The peaceful use of chemistry, as recommended by the relevant provisions of the Convention, should be given greater support by our Conference, which has been urged to adopt concrete, non-discriminatory, and effective measures to promote economic and technological development, as provided for under Article XI of the Convention. To do this, my delegation calls for the strengthening of international cooperation in technological and scientific areas, so as to enable all States to develop their industrial capacities and scientific and technical knowledge in the field of chemistry. It is without question that by showing solidarity and providing the OPCW with the resources that it needs, we can strengthen trust among States Parties and enable all of them to take advantage of the positive benefits of research and the use of chemistry for purposes not prohibited under the Convention.

As this will be the final session of the Conference of the States Parties in which the Non-Aligned Movement and China is under the chairmanship of the Islamic Republic of Iran, I should like to join all those who spoke before me in expressing my thanks to this State Party for having led the Movement with distinction and efficiency.

As I repeat my country's commitment to the objectives of the Convention, allow me in closing to reaffirm the full contribution of my delegation to the work of this Conference and to assure you of our readiness to support consensus to bring our deliberations to a conclusion, and to thank the African Group and all OPCW States Parties for the trust they have placed in my country by electing Tunisia as Vice-Chair of the Nineteenth Session of the Conference.

I should be obliged, Madam Chairperson, if this statement could be considered as an official document of the Nineteenth Session of the Conference of the States Parties and published on the official website of the Organisation.

I thank you all for your kind attention.

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