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BELGIUM

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR CHRISTIAN LEPAGE
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF BELGIUM TO THE OPCW
AT THE EIGHTY-SEVENTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairperson, thank you for giving me the floor.

Mr Director-General,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Belgium fully aligns itself with the statement made by the Permanent Representative of Bulgaria on behalf of the European Union, but would nonetheless like to underscore two points, namely the Syrian Arab Republic and the Fourth Review Conference.

Syrian Arab Republic

My delegation remains concerned about the lack of significant progress in this dossier since the Eighty-First Session of the Executive Council (hereinafter “the Council”), in March 2016, and about the conclusions reached by the Director-General in his report EC-87/HP/DG.1 (dated 2 March 2018) on the work of the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT).

Admittedly, it is encouraging to see that two chemical weapons production facilities should be destroyed in the coming weeks, following their inspection by the Technical Secretariat (hereinafter “the Secretariat”), thereby bringing to a close the process of completely eliminating the 27 chemical weapons production facilities declared by the Syrian Arab Republic.

Conversely, apart from the question of the role of the Scientific Studies and Research Centre in the Syrian chemical weapons programme, Belgium regrets the conclusion reached by the Secretariat according to which, since the Director-General’s report of 3 October on the work of the DAT (EC-86/HP/DG.2, dated 3 October 2017 and Corr.1, dated 5 October 2017), the Secretariat has not received any new information on the other gaps and inconsistencies in the Syrian Arab Republic’s declaration.

Worse, the Director-General has informed us that, in fact, there has been an increase in the number of these issues and, for this reason, the Secretariat is still not in a position to state that the Syrian Arab Republic has submitted a declaration that can be considered complete and correct in accordance with the Chemical Weapons Convention (hereinafter “the Convention”) and decision EC-M-33/DEC.1.



What is the real story behind the chemical warfare agent tabun, which was not in the Syrian Arab Republic's initial declaration, but appeared in an exchange of letters between the Syrian Arab Republic and the Director-General? If the existence of this agent is verified, it must be added to the list of undeclared chemical warfare agents, thereby bringing their number to five in total. It must be acknowledged that this new information is hardly reassuring, and casts doubt as to the reality of the complete elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme.

The Belgian delegation reiterates its call on the Syrian Arab Republic to cooperate in an exemplary way so that the still too many outstanding issues can be truly resolved.

It goes without saying that Belgium is also extremely concerned about the allegations of use of chemical weapons in several places on Syrian territory since the last session of the Council.

Belgium cannot accept these repeated violations of the norm established by the drafters of the Convention, the obligations of which all States Parties to this legal instrument committed to respect upon ratifying it. Any violators of the Convention will one day have to answer for their acts and pay the price. It is in this context that Belgium fully supports the joint statement initiated by France following the creation of the International Partnership Against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons in Paris on 23 January 2018. On behalf of my delegation, I express the hope that the circle of participants in this Partnership will expand quickly to include as many States Parties as possible. To the States Parties that have not yet become members of the Partnership, I urge them to join it. Through such action, they will renew their commitment to the Convention and clearly express their desire for justice to be done for the victims and their determination to work together to prevent the use of these weapons anywhere.

Review Conference

Today, the norm against the use of chemical weapons is not being undermined by the actions of the Syrian Arab Republic alone. The attacks carried out by Daesh in Iraq and in the Syrian Arab Republic, but also the incidents in Malaysia and in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, have demonstrated this. Accordingly, the Review Conference must be an opportunity to defend the norm and even strengthen it. States Parties must reaffirm their willingness to respect the provisions of the Convention and to accept the consequences if these provisions are violated. Particular emphasis should be placed on the full implementation of Article VII of the Convention. To the numerous States Parties that still do not have legislation in place that is in line with the Convention, I urge them to bridge this gap as quickly as possible.

We have not lost sight of the fact that terrorism knows no boundaries. In this context, Belgium welcomes the adoption last year of the decision addressing the threat posed by the use of chemical weapons by non-State actors. The development, production, acquisition, possession, stockpiling, retention, transfer, and use of chemical weapons by non-State actors threatens the object and purpose of the Convention as well as the goal to achieve a world free from chemical weapons. The OPCW must continue to follow this issue in cooperation with other relevant actors at the local, regional, and global levels.

Finally, the announcement that a nerve agent was used in Salisbury, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland on 4 March is extremely alarming, and Belgium hopes that all of the evidence to establish the truth and responsibilities can be gathered quickly.

I thank you and would ask that this statement be considered as an official document of this session of the Council.

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