

94th session of the Executive Council of the OPCW

Ambassador Gomez, Mr Chair, congratulations on your new role! The United Kingdom is grateful to you, and to the Director-General, for your efforts to ensure that this meeting can go ahead safely.

Thanks to decisions taken by States Parties, on 7 June 2020 control measures covering a range of toxic chemicals, including the Novichok agent used in Salisbury in 2018, officially entered into force. This helps to ensure these deadly chemical weapons are never used again. And it demonstrates the enduring importance of the OPCW's work.

Preventing the use of chemical weapons is this Organisation's top priority. That's why we welcomed publication of the first report of the Investigation and Identification Team in April. We are grateful to the Director-General, and to the coordinator of the IIT, Ambassador Oñate, for the briefing they held on 8 April. The United Kingdom set out its views in our statement of 14 April – in short, the IIT report showed there is no room for any reasonable doubt about Syria's responsibility for the three attacks in Ltamenah in March 2017. Syria used chemical weapons, in direct violation of the Convention.

We, as Executive Council members, must now take action on the findings of the report, in preparation for the next Conference of States Parties in November. It is our duty to uphold and implement the principles enshrined in the Chemical Weapons Convention. We must address compliance failings where they are identified, and Syria must urgently take steps to redress the situation. We owe it to the victims of these terrible attacks.

Mr Chair,

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a tragedy for some, and has created uncertainty for us all. And it has underlined the importance of international cooperation, and unity in dealing with common threats.

We have all had to adapt to try to get business done differently. The United Kingdom believes that it is crucial for the OPCW to be able to adapt to changing circumstances. Last month, I was pleased to participate in an online, interactive meeting on capacity building for designated laboratories. The UK is delighted to support this project, and pleased the meeting could go ahead virtually. This is a great example of the OPCW continuing its vital work online. We encourage the Technical Secretariat to be creative, and use all the tools at its disposal to ensure that its important work can continue.

With this in mind, the United Kingdom is keen to learn more about the Technical Secretariat's plans for resuming Article VI inspections when circumstances allow. The process will need to be fair and balanced. Openness and transparency are essential to giving States Parties confidence that we are protecting the health and safety of everyone involved in the Article VI

inspection process.

Looking ahead to the rest of the year, we recognise that current uncertainties in the global environment will require difficult decisions from us all. With this in mind, we look forward to receiving the budget proposal, which we will study carefully so that we can reach agreement on the best way forward for the OPCW.

Thank you Mr Chair.