

# 95th session of the Executive Council of the OPCW

Ambassador Gomez, Mr Chair, The United Kingdom is grateful to you, and to the Director-General, for your continued efforts to ensure that the Executive Council can meet safely.

The Technical Secretariat has made great strides in adapting to the evolving COVID-19 situation. It is imperative that this process continues given the likelihood of an extended period of restrictions. We welcome the pragmatic approach taken in relation to the resumption of Article VI inspections. The UK was pleased to have been able to accommodate inspections in recent weeks. The situation obviously remains very fluid but it is important that this work continues.

Mr Chair, the OPCW must have the resources needed to fulfil its mandate. The UK is a staunch supporter of the work of this organisation but we are also keen to ensure that those resources are well spent. UK experts have carefully reviewed the Director-General's proposed programme and budget for 2021. We have concluded that it is both proportionate and reasonable. Assessed contributions will not increase whilst current levels of activity will be maintained, including all capacity building programmes. We call on all Executive Council members to support the draft Decision and recommend its adoption by the next Conference of the States Parties.

Mr Chair,

On 2 September, we were deeply concerned to hear from the German authorities that there was unequivocal proof that Mr Alexey Navalny had been poisoned by a nerve agent from the Novichok group. It is completely unacceptable that a chemical weapon was used in what appears to have been the attempted assassination of an opposition politician. We wish Mr Navalny well for a swift recovery and welcome the news that he has now been able to leave hospital in Berlin.

It is less than three years since we saw first-hand the deadly consequences of Novichok used as a chemical weapon in the United Kingdom. We are appalled that there should have been a repeat anywhere in the world.

The Russian authorities must fully investigate the circumstances of this chemical weapons attack on their soil. Russia should share its findings with the OPCW and this Council. The Technical Secretariat has made clear that it is ready to provide any technical assistance that is required. We urge Russia to take them up on the offer.

The purpose of this Organisation is to safeguard the prohibition on the use of chemical weapons. The Executive Council has a critical role to play in upholding that long-established international norm.

Russia must now give a full account of these events.

Mr Chair,

At the last meeting of this Council in July we took important action in response to the findings of the first report of the OPCW's Investigation and Identification Team. The Syrian regime was found to have used chemical weapons on three separate occasions, in a blatant breach of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

This Council has clearly set out the steps needed for Syria to come into compliance with the Convention and we urge them to do so, in full, in advance of the 90 day deadline. We look forward to the Director-General's report on the progress made. It is our collective duty to ensure the implementation of the obligations that were freely entered into by all states parties and, if necessary, the issue will be taken up at the next Conference of States Parties.

In conclusion, Mr Chair, the United Kingdom recognises the value of the range of programmes and activities conducted by the OPCW. The capacity building work will have enduring benefit for us all. We were pleased to make a voluntary contribution of £800,000 in August. We are now delighted to announce that the UK is finalising a further £1 million voluntary contribution towards the establishment of the Chem Tech Centre and the Trust Fund for Security and Business Continuity, specifically cyber security.

Thank you, Mr Chair.