

# 96th session of the Executive Council of the OPCW

Ambassador Vásquez Gómez, Mr Chair, the United Kingdom would like to underline again our thanks to you and the Director-General, for enabling the Executive Council to convene in a safe way during the on-going pandemic.

Mr Chair,

Next week will mark the tenth anniversary of the start of the conflict in Syria. The United Kingdom deplores the use of chemical weapons which have been a devastating feature of the Syrian conflict. The recent UN Commission of Inquiry report documented 38 separate instances of the use of chemical weapons, of which 32 met its standard of proof for attribution to the Syrian regime. The UK calls on all States Parties to condemn the appalling chemical weapons attacks which have taken place in Syria.

The Syrian regime has repeatedly used chemical weapons against the Syrian people. Such acts can have no justification. Almost a year has passed since Syria was found to have used chemical weapons in three separate attacks in Ltamenah in 2017. In response, last July, the Executive Council clearly set out the steps required for Syria to come into compliance with the Convention. The Syrian regime has failed either to take the necessary steps, or to cooperate with the Council.

Syria's blatant disregard for its obligations under the terms of Convention is a matter of grave concern for all States Parties. The Conference of States Parties must now address Syria's breaches of international law. The United Kingdom commends the draft Decision text on next steps, tabled by France, and calls on all States Parties to support it.

Mr Chair,

It is appalling that we saw chemical weapons used again in 2020 when Alexey Navalny was poisoned with a nerve agent from the Novichok group in Russia. We thank the Director-General for publishing the correspondence between the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation and the Technical Secretariat regarding the technical assistance visit requested by Russia in accordance with Article VIII, paragraph 38(e) of the Convention. The United Kingdom benefited from such technical assistance visits in 2018, having swiftly and fully complied with the standard requirements to enable such visits to take place. It is deeply regrettable that the Russian Federation has apparently cancelled its request for technical assistance and has still to provide a coherent explanation of events.

Russia must account to this organisation for the use of a chemical weapon on its territory. There can be no impunity and those responsible must be held to account.

Mr Chair,

COVID-19 continues to bring real challenges to delivering the wider work of the OPCW, including capacity building activities and industry inspections. We recognise the adaptations that the Technical Secretariat has had to make and are pleased to see successful innovations in terms of delivering more training and other activities remotely. It is imperative that we take as many positives as we can from this experience and that the Technical Secretariat continues to adapt and evolve. The United Kingdom stands ready to support.

Mr Chair,

It is very encouraging to see that the budget for the Chem Tech Centre, to which the United Kingdom has contributed over £1 million, is now nearly fully funded. As current Chair of the Global Partnership we are very pleased that the membership has made such a significant contribution towards the costs of the project and we are keen to encourage further support for the OPCW from the Global Partnership.

With the transition to biennial budgeting now underway, the Chem Tech Centre project accelerating and planned destruction efforts close to fruition it is important that we look ahead. The United Kingdom is ready to work with all OPCW members and the Director-General to lay out a clear strategic vision for the future of the OPCW; and ensure a world truly free from the horrors of chemical weapons.

Thank you, Mr Chair.