

98th session of the Executive Council of the OPCW

Mr Chairman,

The United Kingdom is committed to keeping the OPCW informed of developments around the use of a chemical weapon in 2018 in Salisbury. On 21 September 2021, UK Police and the Crown Prosecution Service announced the authorisation of charges against a third individual, Denis Sergeev, for his role in the poisonings. Sergeev, like the other two suspects, is a member of the Military Intelligence Service of the Russian Federation.

The charges are the result of an ongoing, independent police investigation into the use of a chemical weapon from the novichok group on UK soil. A coroner's inquest is also now underway into the death of Dawn Sturgess, following her exposure to novichok in Amesbury in July 2018. This independent process is being conducted by the former Lady Justice of Appeal, Lady Hallett.

The attack led to the death of a British citizen and recklessly endangered the lives of many more. The United Kingdom again calls on Russia to fulfil its obligations to this Convention and to this Organisation. We urge Russia again to declare in full its stock of chemical weapons and to work with the OPCW to destroy them.

Mr Chairman,

Independent laboratory analyses confirmed that a novichok agent was also used to poison Alexey Navalny on the territory of the Russian Federation in August 2020. The Russian Federation must disclose in full the circumstances surrounding the attack.

Mr Chairman,

The United Kingdom is grateful to the Technical Secretariat for the briefing on Syria on 30 September 2021. What is clear from this briefing and the monthly reporting is that Syria is continuing to disregard its obligations under the Convention. This cannot continue.

It is imperative that Syria issues visas for Technical Secretariat staff as required by this Council and without obstruction or delay. Syria must also explain why – contrary to instructions from the Technical Secretariat – the cylinders identified as evidence in the Douma chemical weapons attack were purportedly moved around 60km from where they were supposed to be stored and then, allegedly, destroyed. While the regime deliberately avoids telling this Organisation the complete truth about its chemical weapons programme, this Council must conclude that Syria prefers not to respect its treaty obligations.

Mr Chairman,

Faced with such challenges, it is incumbent on all States Parties to ensure the OPCW has the resources required to fulfil its mandate. Recognising the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on all activities, the United Kingdom welcomes the stated commitment to return to the agreed level of 241 annual Article VI inspections in 2024. The United Kingdom is grateful for the detailed discussions held on the proposed Programme and Budget for 2022 and 2023. We recognise that a long period of zero nominal growth has put pressure on the Organisation's ability to deliver and with that in mind the UK is able to support the proposal before the Council. The effective functioning of the OPCW, including delivering effective capacity building support, relies on payment of assessed contributions in full and on time. The United Kingdom encourages all State Parties to fulfil this obligation.

Mr Chairman,

This Council meets again under constraints imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. We look forward to restrictions continuing to ease. The United Kingdom welcomes the German initiative to forge agreement on ensuring OPCW business continuity in emergency circumstances and calls on others to join consensus on the proposal.

Mr Chairman,

This Executive Council has the important task of considering the re-appointment of Director-General Arias. The United Kingdom warmly welcomes the Director-General's candidacy for a second term, and will join other Council members in making a positive recommendation to the Conference. D-G Arias can be assured of the full support of the United Kingdom now and into the future.

The next few years are of great importance for the Organisation. The new Centre for Chemistry and Technology should allow the Technical Secretariat to reinforce its knowledge base in support of Verification, as well as to build a durable International Cooperation and Assistance offer that meets the needs of States Parties. As we look towards the end of destruction of declared stockpiles and the Review Conference, we should celebrate the successes. But we must also ensure the Organisation is equipped with both a strong vision for its future, and the capability to implement it on behalf of all States Parties. The United Kingdom will play a full and constructive role in these discussions.

Thank you Mr Chairman.