

# Baroness Goldie speech at 25th Conference of States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention

Director-General, ladies and gentlemen,

Firstly, congratulations Mr Chairman on your election. Many thanks to you, Director-General Arias, and the OPCW Technical Secretariat, for your herculean efforts to support the convening of the Conference amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. Like you, I look forward to a time when more of us can gather in person.

2020 has been a challenging year on many fronts. I want to pay particular tribute to the OPCW Technical Secretariat staff who have adapted to deliver more capacity-building programmes on-line; sought to maintain a programme of industry inspections; and addressed the use of chemical weapons.

The international community's revulsion at the use of chemical weapons remains undimmed. Great strides have been taken towards eliminating these abhorrent weapons, and the Chemical Weapons Convention is rightly heralded as a global success. But it is not a success that we can take for granted.

In recent years, we have seen chemical weapons used in Syria, Iraq, Malaysia, the UK, and now Russia. This poses a clear threat to the security of us all. It must be addressed.

The UK welcomed the publication of the first report from the Investigation and Identification team in April, a very robust document, and its clear findings. In July, the Executive Council set out very clear steps for Syria to take to come into compliance with the Convention. Regrettably, the Syrian regime's response was to ignore the Executive Council and to continue a campaign vilifying the OPCW Technical Secretariat.

As recommended by the Council the issue will now be taken up at the Conference. The United Kingdom is co-sponsoring the draft decision condemning the Syrian regime's use of chemical weapons and suspending certain rights and privileges, until they come into compliance with the Convention.

We cannot stand by in the face of incontrovertible evidence that chemical weapons have been used and that a State Party is flouting its obligations under the Convention. The decision proposes an approach which adheres closely to the provisions of the Convention, and we urge all States Parties to support it.

Mr Chair,

The UK was appalled to learn of a second confirmed use of a Novichok nerve agent to attack the Russian opposition figure, Alexey Navalny, in August. It is less than three years since my own country experienced the deadly

consequences of the use of Novichok as a chemical weapon. We wish Mr Navalny well for a swift recovery.

Let us be clear, any poisoning with a nerve agent constitutes a use of a chemical weapon under the terms of the Chemical Weapons Convention. The Technical Secretariat has shared with States Parties the findings of independent sample analysis, confirming German, Swedish and French laboratory analysis. The evidence is undeniable.

The UK considers that there is no plausible explanation for Mr Navalny's poisoning other than Russian involvement and responsibility for this appalling attack. We call on the Russian Federation to fully declare its Novichok programme to the OPCW.

Russia must fully explain to the Conference how a chemical weapon of a type developed by the Soviet Union came to be used against a Russian opposition politician on Russian territory. Those responsible must be held to account.  
Mr Chair,

The OPCW must have the resources needed to fulfil its mandate. The United Kingdom will be supporting the Director-General's proposed programme and budget for 2021, as recommended by the Executive Council. It is proportionate and reasonable whilst maintaining assessed contributions at their previous level. The budget will enable all capacity building programmes to be sustained and support the organisation's resilience amidst the challenges posed by Covid-19. We encourage all states to join consensus on adopting the budget proposals.

Mr Chair,

The United Kingdom was pleased to be able to provide an additional £1.9 million in voluntary contributions in 2020. This funding will help support the establishment of the new OPCW Chemistry and Technology Centre; build laboratory capacity in Africa and Latin America; build capacity in Africa to respond to the use of chemical weapons; as well as enhancing the OPCW's cyber security and addressing Syria's chemical weapons programme.

Mr Chair,

Recent events have highlighted the imperative of States Parties continuing to come together to reject all use of chemical weapons. We need to remember why we are all here. Upholding the Convention and supporting the work of the Technical Secretariat is central to safeguarding our collective security. It is as important now as it was when we first came together to implement the Convention and establish the Technical Secretariat.

Verifying the destruction of all declared stockpiles is now close to completion. The big challenge ahead is to address the undeclared chemical weapons programmes, the covert caches of lethal substances: only then will we fully realise the object and purpose of the Convention and consign these appalling weapons to the history books.

Thank you, Mr Chair.