Speech: “The Russian State was responsible for the attempted murder…and for threatening the lives of other British citizens in Salisbury.”

Thank you Mr President.

And thank you for arranging this urgent meeting of the of the Security Council today to give the UK the opportunity to update Council colleagues on our investigation into a nerve agent attack in Salisbury.

On Sunday 4 March, Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia were found in the town centre slipping out of consciousness on a public bench and were taken to hospital by our emergency services, where they remain in a very serious condition.

Investigations by world-leading experts at the Defence, Science and Technology laboratory at Porton Down, accredited by the OPCW, discovered that they had been exposed to a nerve agent. British Police Officer Nick Bailey, was also exposed and remains in hospital in a serious condition. Hundreds of British citizens have been potentially exposed to this nerve agent in what was an indiscriminate and reckless act against the United Kingdom. We have deployed our military to secure and decontaminate numerous sites. The police continue an exhaustive, wide-scale investigation. Through those investigations, we have concluded that Mr Skripal and his daughter were poisoned with a “Novichok”, a military grade nerve agent of a type developed by Russia.

It is not a weapon which can be manufactured by non-state actors. It is so dangerous that it requires the highest-grade state laboratories and expertise. Based on the knowledge that Russia has previously produced this agent and combined with Russia’s record of conducting state sponsored assassinations – including against former intelligence officers whom they regard as legitimate targets – the UK Government concluded that it was highly likely that Russia was responsible for this reckless act.

We saw only two plausible explanations: either it was a direct attack by Russia on my country; or Russia had lost control of a military-grade nerve agent which they had developed. We requested the Russian Government provide an explanation by the end of Tuesday 13 March on how this Russian-produced nerve agent could have been deployed in Salisbury. They provided no credible explanation which could suggest they lost control of their nerve agent.

Mr President, we therefore have no alternative but to conclude that the Russian State was responsible for the attempted murder of Mr Skripal and his

daughter, and Police Officer Nick Bailey, and for threatening the lives of other British citizens in Salisbury.

Mr President, this was no common crime. It was an unlawful use of force – a violation of article two of the United Nations charter, the basis of the international legal order.

Mr President, the UK is proud to have been one of the states who played an integral role in drafting the Chemical Weapons Convention, a landmark piece of international law. We are therefore dismayed that Russia suggested that our response fails to meet the requirements of the convention. Article 7 of the Convention calls on the State Parties to implement the convention under their own legislation. The United Kingdom has enacted the Chemical Weapons Act in order to fully comply with this obligation. That legislation, together with relevant criminal law, is now guiding our investigation into this incident, as the convention was designed.

This was an attack on UK soil. Under the convention, we have the right to lead our response, engaging the OPCW and others as appropriate. On 8 March the UK formally notified the OPCW Technical Secretariat that a chemical attack had taken place on UK soil. The Russian Federation has complained that we are not using article 9 of the Convention. On the contrary, on 12 March, once it became clear to us that the United Kingdom had been attacked, my Foreign Secretary summoned the Russian Ambassador and sought an explanation from his government, as article 9 is clear we have the right to do. We have received no meaningful response. It is therefore Russia which is failing to comply with the provisions of the convention and this Council should not fall for their attempts to muddy the waters. In addition the UK has welcomed the offer of technical assistance from the Director General of the OPCW and we have invited the Technical Secretariat to independently verify our analysis. We are making every effort to expedite this process.

Mr President, let us now turn to the part of the Chemical Weapons convention which Russia not talking about. The part which requires State Parties to declare chemical weapons stockpiles and facilities which have been used at any time since 1946 to produce chemical weapons. Chemical weapons were to be verifiably destroyed and production facilities destroyed or converted subject to approval, within ten years of entry into force of the Convention. Russia completed destruction of its declared stockpile in September 2017 – ten years later than required by the Convention and five years beyond the single five year extension period.

Russia did not declare Novichok agents or production facilities associated with them as it was required to do under the Convention. No development facilities were declared. Yet we know from testimony by the Russian scientist Vil Mirzanayov that Novichoks were developed as part of the Soviet Union’s offensive chemical warfare programme and inherited by the Russian Federation. Such facilities associated with that programme should have been declared under the CWC. Even today, a Russian politician has said that Russia has destroyed the Novichok nerve gas.

Mr President, from all of this we can conclude that Russia is in serious

breach of the Chemical Weapons convention through its failure to declare the Novichok programme. This fact alone means you should discount any arguments you hear from them about the possibility of other countries having inherited this technology. Had Russia declared and destroyed their own programme, there might have been some truth to this.

Mr President, on 4 March a weapon so horrific that it is banned from use in war was used in a peaceful city in my country. This was a reckless act carried out by people who disregard the sanctity of human life, who are indifferent to whether innocents are caught up in their attacks. They either did not care that the weapon used would be traced back to them, or mistakenly believed that they could cover their traces. Russian officials and media channels have repeatedly threatened those they consider traitors, even after the 4 March attacks.

Russia has a history of state-sponsored assassinations, including that of Alexander Litvinienko, poisoned by radioactive materials in my country a decade ago.

Russia has a history of interfering in other countries, whether the botched coup in Montenegro, repeated cyber-attacks on other states or seeking to influence others' democratic processes.

Russia has a history of flouting international law, most egregiously in Crimea, Eastern Ukraine and Georgia.

Russia shows disregard for civilian life, we all remember flight MH17 shot down by Russian proxies, supplied with Russian weapons.

And Russia has shown in its repeated protection of Asad's chemical weapons use that it has different standards when it comes to the use of these terrible substances.

We have not jumped to conclusions. We have carried out a thorough, careful investigation, which continues. We are asking the OPCW to independently verify the nerve agent used. We have offered Russia the chance to explain. But Russia has refused.

We have therefore concluded that the Russian state was involved and we have taken certain measures in response. In taking these measures we have been clear that we have no disagreement with the people of Russia who have been responsible for so many great achievements throughout history. It is the reckless acts of their Government which we oppose.

Mr President, we are grateful for the support of so many countries around the world. We will come back to the Council as the investigations make more progress and continue to keep you informed.

We have already heard the attacks and threats Russia has made over the past few days. We know that there will be more to come. This is how Russia has acted in every other case where it has been caught flouting international law: denial, distraction and threats. It is what Russia does.

But we will not let such threats deter us. We will not weaken our resolve. We will stand firm, confident in our democracy, our rule of law and the freedom of our people. We will stand by the values which are shared by the overwhelming majority of those in this Council, in this United Nations. And we ask you today to stand by us.

Thank you.