

Convention for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons

29th Conference of States Parties

Statement by Amb. Engelbert Theuermann

Permanent Representative of Austria to the OPCW

General Debate

The Hague, 25 November - 29 November 2024

Chair, Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen

Austria warmly welcomes you, Ambassador Almir Sahovic, as the chair of this conference and we assure you of our full support.

We would also like to thank the outgoing chair, Ambassador Mustansar Tarar, as well as all committee members, the chair of the Executive Council as well as the Director General of OPCW and the Technical Secretariat for their excellent and hard work.

Chair, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Austria is fully aligned with the Statement delivered by the European Union and we would like to add a few remarks in our national capacity.

We are very concerned about the rise of international conflict and tensions and mourn all victims of such conflicts in the Middle East, Africa, Europe and elsewhere in the world. We strongly urge all parties to armed conflict to fully respect international law and in particular international humanitarian law. We are strongly concerned that the absolute prohibition of chemical weapons is fully upheld. Austria condemns any use of chemical weapons by any actor and under any circumstances. Some say that the rules-based international order is skewed towards the interests of part of the

world alone. But let's be very clear: International law, in particular the principles of the UN Charter, applies to all countries equally.

We would like to underline the constructive work the Technical Secretariat and we, the States Parties to the Convention have undertaken over many decades. This made it possible to complete the destruction of all declared stockpiles in 2023. However, three major threats to the integrity of the Convention and its norms remain and need to be put high on our agenda:

Firstly, we thank the Technical Secretariat for the report on its recent mission to Ukraine which presents strong evidence for the use of RCAs by Russia in its unprovoked, unjustified and illegal war of aggression against Ukraine. There are also reports on the use of Chloropicrin by Russia in Ukraine. These reports are of grave concern and we urge Russia to stop any violation against the CWC immediately. In the same vein we urge Russia to allow investigations to fully clarify the circumstances of the death of Mr. Nawalny. We also strongly reject any attempts by Russia to spread disinformation among States Parties.

Austria supports **Czechia and North Macedonia for the EEG seats in the EC**. Both countries are longstanding strong supporters of the Chemical Weapons Convention, and responsible members of the Organization and contribute actively to fulfilling the objectives of the Convention. Illegal armed aggression by a State Party against another in a region is a regional factor that cannot be ignored, further to the fact that this candidate also has a track record of violations against the CCW.

Secondly, **Syria**, more than 10 years after signing up to the Convention, is not fulfilling its obligation to account for its chemical weapons program in full. The Declaration Assessment Team/DAT recently identified two new areas of investigation. Distinguished delegates, the number of 19 outstanding issues may seem abstract, but the reports of DAT make it clear that the issues behind that

number are indeed serious, of large quantity and considerable gravity. We remain strongly concerned about the lack of compliance of Syria with the Convention and the lack of cooperation and progress in its relations with the Secretariat.

Thirdly, regarding **new and emerging technologies**, we commend DG Arias and the EC of last July for having put this topic firmly on the agenda. We welcome the Global Conference on the Role of Artificial Intelligence in advancing the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention in Rabat, and we thank Morocco for its important contribution. We welcome that a Temporary Working Group on AI under the Scientific Advisory Board has been established and that this Group of Experts will further work on this issue. We fully support the intention of the DG to issue a paper providing guidance and recommendations on the further work of the Organisation on this important topic. This will be a big step forward to clarify how we can use emerging technologies for the effective implementation of the Convention and on the other hand, may lay the ground to prevent now what we may not be able to stop in the future concerning the misuse of such technologies.

I am very proud that a highly respected Austrian expert, Mr. Günther Povoden, was able to contribute the work of OPCW on these and other issues as a member of the SAB, including the last two years as its Chair. Austria stands ready to continue to support the work of the Organization in this regard.

In concluding, allow me to remind us of the words by Nobel Laureate and former President of Liberia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf:

“History will judge us not by what we say in this moment in time, but by what we do next to lift the lives of our countrymen and women. It will judge us by the legacy we leave behind for generations to come.”

Thank you for your attention.

