



Courtesy translation

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Statement by H.E. Ambassador Olivier Belle, Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Belgium to the OPCW at the 29th session of the OPCW Conference under Agenda Item No. 8 (General Debate)

Belgium wishes to once more seize the opportunity of the general debate to thank the Technical Secretariat and the Director general for their professionalism and respect for the rules governing their action. It is upon these solid foundations that the Organisation acts in the best interest of all its members.

Competence and professionalism of the policy-making organs are all the more important that the Organisation has important challenges to address in the medium and long run. As an example, the Rabat Conference unveiled some of the challenges posed by the exceptional predictive capacity of artificial intelligence.

Governance questions are also central to the good management of the Organisation. Ensuring such good governance requires, on the one hand, to support the budget proposal for 2025 that is duly justified. On the other hand, the efficient functioning of OPWC also demands some flexibility. Therefore, Belgium strongly supports the renewal of the possibility granted to the director-general to rehire inspectors. Maintaining expertise within the organisation is a key challenge for the Organisation. Ultimately, on the governance aspects, Belgium supports and commends the inclusive work of the ambassadors of Costa Rica and Germany aiming at increasing predictability and transparency of the accreditation process of the NGOs wishing to participate to the work of the Organisation. In this respect, Belgium regrets the blockage by two States towards text proposals that were both perfectly sensible and reasonable.

On the Syrian dossier, we would like to recall the importance of enabling the Organisation to deliver on its mandate to verify initial declarations. Belgium is concerned by the recent addition of two new « outstanding issues » to the Syrian dossier, following the preliminary analysis of the samples collected by the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT). We also remain concerned, more generally, by the enduring lack of good faith cooperation by Syria.

With respect to the Russian-Ukrainian file, we have read the report published on 18 November 2024 by the OPCW relating to the technical assistance visit that took place in Ukraine. We note with gravity and outrage that this report confirms the presence of a riot control agent (CS) on the front line.

This chemical agent CS has been identified in samples collected in a Ukrainian trench. We condemn in the strongest possible terms the violation of the norm.

We further commend the precision and meticulousness of the Technical Secretariat's report as well as the entire cooperation of Ukraine with this technical body of the Organisation.

As opposed to this, we note that the Russian allegations towards Ukraine are deprived of any science-based evidence, that Russia does not involve the Technical Secretariat in its alleged researches and analysis and that those fail to abide by elementary principles such as documentation of provenance and showing preservation of the chain of custody.

Besides, despite clear legal advice delivered by the Head of the Legal Office of this Organisation during the 107th session of the Executive Council, Russia keeps abusing, in its note verbale of 12 November 2024, of the accreditation of its military laboratory to give an appearance of credibility to its alleged findings that are however the pure product of a national – and not an OPCW-requested – enterprise.

It goes without saying that only the allegations confirmed by the Technical Secretariat in its capacity as neutral agent serving the truth and with due respect of the procedures, can be considered as established.

In this context of violation of the norm, documented by the work of the Technical Secretariat, it would be inconceivable to rehabilitate Russia into the Executive Council. For this reason, and taking into account their inherent quality of engaged and responsible members of this Organisation, Belgium expresses its full support to the candidacies to the Executive Council of Czech Republic and North Macedonia.

To conclude, we would like to reaffirm Belgium's commitment to contribute, to the best of its capacities, to the important work of the Executive Council, itself paving the way to the work of the Conference. Building a world free of chemical weapons through an organisation able to counter reemergence has always constituted a foundational vocation of our country.

Mr. Olivier Belle
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of Belgium to the International Institutions based in The Hague