



National Statement delivered by Ambassador Susanne Riegraf,
Acting Commissioner for Disarmament and Arms Control
of the German Federal Government

At the 29th session of the Conference of the States Parties

Mr Chairman, Director-General,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me congratulate our Chairman, Ambassador Almir Šahović of Bosnia and Herzegovina, on his election as Chairperson of the 29th Conference of States Parties. My delegation assures you of our full support.

Chair,

This conference takes place against the background of a worsening international security environment. We are shocked by the scale of terror which triggered the current conflict in the Middle East and appalled at the violence, loss of life and the devastating humanitarian situation it led to. In Europe, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine is in its third year, in blatant disregard of international law and the principles of the UN Charter. Sudan is the victim of one of the most brutal civil wars ever, with innocent civilians paying the price. The scourge of war is rampant again, while arms control and disarmament norms are eroding.

This includes, alarmingly, the area of weapons of mass destruction. In the nuclear field, we witness Russia's irresponsible nuclear rhetoric, its suspension of the New START treaty and its recent acceptance if not backing of the DPRK's nuclear weapons programme by calling the denuclearization of North Korea a "closed issue". Regrettably, the continuous reduction of nuclear arsenals that we saw after the end of the Cold War is being reversed.

The Chemical Weapons Convention, a major pillar of the international arms control and disarmament architecture, is not immune from these tendencies. This is all the more regrettable as it has produced real success.

Last year we marked the so far biggest success for the OPCW and for the joint security of all of us in the field of chemical weapons with the completion of the destruction of all declared chemical weapons stockpiles. There was hope that the global community had made historic progress towards its objective to rid humankind forever of the scourge of chemical warfare.

This year, we realize that we may actually be going backwards again.

We continue to see Russian troops using riot control agents in its war of aggression against Ukraine, in order to smoke out Ukrainian forces from their entrenched positions. Let me recall that the use of riot control agents as a method of warfare is prohibited under Article I of this Convention. In addition, we see the increasing use of the choking agent chloropicrin, which is a chemical warfare agent listed under the Convention.

In this context, I firmly reject the false and unfounded allegations by the Russian Vice-Minister that western countries were providing Ukraine with chemicals prohibited under the Chemical Weapons Convention. The assistance that Germany delivered to Ukraine is fully in accordance with the provision of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Chair,

The report issued on 18 November by the Technical Secretariat on a Technical Assistance Visit conducted in Ukraine and on the subsequent analysis of samples from the battlefield is a sad confirmation that riot control agents are being used in the conflict, in breach of the CWC. Although the report does not contain a direct attribution, the circumstances described in the report point to a Russian origin of the investigated grenade.

This is a most serious and unacceptable situation: For the first time since the adoption of the CWC, chemical weapons are being used by one State Party against another. This sad development should not leave anybody in this room indifferent. It requires the full attention of States Parties and of the Technical Secretariat.

We have been expressing our grave concern about these developments from the moment we received the first clear indications about what was happening on the ground in Ukraine. We pointed at the reports in Russian state media, showing openly the use of riot control agents and even bragging about how successful the method is.

Together with several partners, Germany asked the Russian Federation for clarification under the consultation, cooperation and fact-finding procedure of Article IX. What we got as a response was unconvincing, evasive and sometimes outright absurd. Instead of clarifying the matter, Russia launched a volley of counter-accusations against Ukraine and Western countries without any evidence ever shown, and a full broadside of disinformation and propaganda. What we did not see in Russia's response was any serious effort to demonstrate Russia's compliance with the Convention.

In these worrying circumstances, we are grateful to the assistance delivered by the Technical Secretariat to Ukraine, for the Technical Assistance Visits that have been carried out and for the analysis of the collected samples. We believe the findings published on 18 November, on the background of the continuing use of riot control and other chemical agents, warrant urgent additional action by the Technical Secretariat to investigate the nature and scale of breaches of the CWC in the conflict and to clearly identify their origin.

Chair,

The sort of reaction we see from Russia in dealing with these concerns is very much reminiscent of the way Russia evaded all responsibility and calls for action to investigate the poisoning of Alexei Navalny with a chemical weapon in 2020. In February this year we were shocked by Mr. Navalny's tragic death in a Russian penal colony. No light has been shed on the circumstances of his sudden death, which raises very serious new questions.

Chair,

In order to uphold the CWC and the global ban on chemical weapons, Russia's unacceptable behaviour and its repeated transgression of international norms must have consequences. It is more than understandable that countries of the Eastern European Group do no longer want to be represented by Russia in the Executive Council. It is only consequential that in 2023 States Parties to the CWC have not re-elected Russia into the Council. A State Party in clear violation of its obligations has no place in the steering body of this Organisation.

This year, Russia is again making a bid for the Executive Council. In view of Russia's complete refusal to clarify the serious allegations against it and given the strong indications for continued and systematic breaches of the Convention in Russia's war of aggression, we call upon all States Parties to stand up to that kind of behaviour and send a clear message by keeping Russia out of the Council. This is not intended to silence Russia – we want them to clarify the situation, and they have all the opportunity to speak out as an observer at the Council. Germany calls on all States Parties to support the candidacies of the Czech Republic and of Northern Macedonia, two States Parties in good standing which have demonstrated their strong support to the global ban of chemical weapons.

Chair,

Regrettably there is another State Party to this Convention which remains a matter of grave concern because of its continued non-compliance with its obligations. Recent findings by the Declaration Assessment Team indicate the continued existence of a covert chemical weapons programme of the Syrian regime. Given its delaying tactics it is difficult to believe that the Syrian side has any intention to engage seriously with the TS. The lack of progress in addressing the still long list of open questions rather shows that all claims of readiness to cooperate that we hear from their representatives are mere lip-service and only serve to camouflage the on-going breaches of Syria's obligations. Again, this is an issue which States parties cannot afford to neglect.

Regarding the horrendous cases of chemical weapons use in Syria that have been investigated and attributed by the OPCW, the perpetrators must be held accountable and their crimes prosecuted.

Chair,

The ever faster developments in science and technology pose enormous challenges to the OPCW in implementing the CWC. Very pressing challenges stem from the rapid development of artificial intelligence. We commend Director-General Arias for recognizing early the scope of the challenges ahead of us, and for laying the ground for a process in the Organisation to respond in time. Germany made a contribution to this process with the Conference on "AI and Weapons of Mass Destruction" which we hosted in Berlin in June, and which the Director-General used for a programmatic speech. We applaud the OPCW's "Conference on the Role

of AI in Advancing the Implementation of the CWC” held in October in Rabat, generously hosted by Morocco with financial support from Germany and other donors. The conference gave a comprehensive overview of the different risks for the Convention, but also highlighted the opportunities of this new technology for instance in the area of verification, especially with regard to analysing open sources. The task now is to translate this analysis into a set of concrete tracks for further work, with the necessary input from scientific and industry experts and a continued involvement of States Parties. Germany will remain fully engaged in this process.

Chair,

The challenges of scientific and technological progress are a good example of an area where the OPCW could undoubtedly benefit from the work, experience and research of the science community, of external stakeholders like the chemical industry and of civil society organisations active in this field. There are many other issues where the engagement from civil society is important and a welcome support to the objectives of our Organisation. Taking up the consideration of this issue at the last Review Conference, Germany together first with Ecuador and then with Costa Rica has conducted informal consultations over the last year on how to improve interaction with civil society in a broader sense. We would like to thank all States Parties who participated in this process. We have always made it clear that this is a question where we need to carefully look at all relevant aspects and ensure that we have everybody on board for moving forward. Together with Costa Rica we will present a set of recommendations to this Conference on how to improve the dialogue with civil society and to foster civil society engagement for our common cause.

I also want to talk about the allegations made by the Deputy-Minister of Iran regarding an alleged German involvement in chemical weapons supply. The use of chemical weapons by Saddam Hussein's government, including against Iran, was a terrible crime that cannot be justified in any way.

However, the Iranian claim that Germany supplied Iraq with chemical weapons is simply false.

At no time were chemical weapons delivered from the Federal Republic of Germany to Iraq or any other country in the world. On the contrary, the Federal Republic of Germany made a

binding commitment very early in its history to renounce the production, use and trade of chemical weapons.

What is true is that dual-use goods, technical systems, equipment and chemical products were delivered from Germany and other Western countries to a number of Middle Eastern countries - including Iraq and Iran - in the 1980s.

We now know that such goods were subsequently misused by Iraq to produce chemical weapons that were used against Iran. However, in no case did the Federal Government issue export licenses for goods that it knew or could have known would be used to produce chemical weapons.

Where illegal deliveries are known to have occurred, they have been prosecuted in German courts and legally binding convictions have been issued. In addition, German export control law, including export controls, criminal offenses and penalties, were drastically tightened as a consequence.

Chair,

Let me conclude by recalling the spectre of an eroding arms control and disarmament architecture. The Chemical Weapons Convention is too valuable as a guarantor of our common security to let it be damaged and weakened. Instead, we as States Parties should do our utmost to defend and further strengthen the global ban of chemical weapons. This conference is the place to act accordingly. The Director-General and the Technical Secretariat can continue counting on Germany's unwavering support for a strong OPCW.

Thank you for your kind attention.