

Statement by H.E. Mrs. Solvita Āboltiņa
Permanent Representative of the Republic of Latvia to the Organisation for the
Prohibition of Chemical Weapons at the 29th Session of
the Conference of the States Parties
25-29 November 2024

Mr. Chairperson,
Director General,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Latvia aligns itself with the statement of the European Union and would like to make the following remarks in our national capacity.

In the beginning let me express gratitude to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Director-General, Ambassador Fernando Arias for heading the Organisation and ensuring the implementation of the Convention. Latvia reiterates its full confidence in the Technical Secretariat's professionalism and impartiality.

Mr. Chairperson,

Today, the issue of chemical weapons remains a pressing concern on the international agenda. Numerous instances of non-compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention (the Convention) underscores the need for reaffirmation of commitment to strengthen the norm against the use of chemical weapons.

Latvia is concerned about Syria's failure to uphold its international responsibilities under the Convention. Investigations by the OPCW and UN have concluded that Syria has used chemical weapons nine times just over the past years. Moreover, there is a pressing need for Syria to provide transparency and more comprehensive information regarding its chemical weapons stockpiles, enabling a thorough assessment of their status. Latvia urges Syria to take decisive action to eliminate its chemical weapons program and to permit the unrestricted access of OPCW personnel for verification.

Mr. Chairperson,

For the third consecutive year, Russia continues its illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, in flagrant violation of the UN Charter. Latvia condemns in the strongest terms Russia's actions and demands an immediate withdrawal of all Russian forces and military equipment from Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders.

Latvia remains deeply concerned of the growing number of reports of Russia's possible use of chemical weapons in Ukraine, particularly riot control agents and the choking agent chloropicrin, which are prohibited by the CWC, as a method of warfare in Ukraine. Particularly alarming are the findings of the OPCW Technical Assistance Visit which confirm the presence of riot control agent "CS" in samples collected in the Dnipropetrovsk region of Ukraine and analyzed in two independent OPCW designated laboratories as described in report S/2338/2024, issued on 18 November 2024. We recall Russia's track record of using chemical weapons in the recent years, including the Skripal and Navalny incidents. Latvia reiterates that there cannot be impunity for chemical weapons use.

A country that violates CWC and continuously challenges the integrity and credibility of OPCW cannot have the privilege to serve on the Executive Council (EC). Latvia strongly supports candidatures of Czech Republic and North Macedonia for the membership in the EC for upcoming term 2025-2027. They are longstanding strong supporters of the CWC, and responsible members of the Organization.

Mr. Chairperson,

Rapid developments of science and technology have both enormous benefits and risks for non-proliferation of chemical weapons. The malicious use of chemical science poses a real and pressing threat which we must confront with vigilance and resolve. The OPCW *ChemTech* centre plays a pivotal role in this effort. Latvia advocates continuous innovation and development of verification technologies and methodologies employed by the OPCW. We also support further work on the impact of Artificial Intelligence on the implementation of the Convention by maximizing its opportunities and reducing its risks.

Latvia strongly believes that integrating gender considerations is essential for the OPCW and the implementation of the Convention. By empowering every voice, we enrich our discussions and strengthen the effectiveness of our solutions. We appreciate the work done by the Director-General and the Technical Secretariat thus far, and we anticipate further advancements in promoting gender equality within the organization.

Thank you.