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FRANCE

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR LUIS VASSY
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE FRENCH REPUBLIC TO THE OPCW
AT THE NINETY-SIXTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairperson,
Mr Director-General,
Distinguished Ambassadors,

France aligns itself with the statement of the European Union. Allow me to add the following remarks in a national capacity.

Mr Chairperson, as you are chairing your last regular session of the Executive Council (“the Council”), I would like to commend the work you achieved during your term, in the particularly difficult and demanding environment in which we have been living for one year.

The Syrian chemical dossier is once again on the agenda of this Council.

The latest report of the Declaration Assessment Team from November highlighted new elements that are also of particular concern. More than seven years after Syria’s accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention (“the Convention”), many issues are still outstanding. We urge Syria to provide all information and documents requested by the Technical Secretariat (“the Secretariat”) and to update its initial declaration, in accordance with its obligations under the Convention. I will come back to this point under the relevant item on the agenda for this session.

The decision “Addressing the Possession and Use of Chemical Weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic”, adopted by the Council at its Ninety-Fourth Session in July (EC-94/DEC.2), constitutes a first step in response to the first report of the Investigation and Identification Team of April 2020.

The decision called on the Syrian regime to comply with its obligations within a reasonable timeframe, setting clear and verifiable parameters. It remained unanswered by the Syrian regime. We deplore this lack of cooperation with the Secretariat and this missed opportunity for Syria to comply with its international obligations.

The Conference of the States Parties, which will meet later in the spring, will examine a draft decision presented by my delegation and co-sponsored by 46 delegations from four regional groups. This broad support clearly demonstrates that States Parties refuse to let the repeated use of chemical weapons in Syria go unanswered, or to compromise the full implementation of the Convention. We urge all States Parties to stay united, to remain steadfast in defending the



Convention, and to prevent any further use of these weapons. You are also aware of my country's commitment to fighting against impunity for the perpetrators of crimes involving the use of chemical weapons.

We were all shocked by the nerve-agent attack perpetrated against Mr Alexei Navalny on 20 August 2020 on the territory of the Russian Federation. The attack, which happened three years after the events in Salisbury, took place within the context of the re-emergence of the use of chemical weapons, which we continue to fight against.

Based on its own analyses, France agrees with the conclusions of several of its European partners in regard to the fact that a novichok nerve agent was used in the poisoning. France condemns in the strongest terms this shocking and reckless use of such an agent. The use of chemical weapons, anywhere, anytime, by anyone, and under any circumstances, is unacceptable and is a violation of the international norms against the use of these weapons.

We regret that Russia withdrew its request for a technical assistance visit, a request that was made in this very room in October 2020. It is imperative that the circumstances surrounding this crime and those who perpetrated it be brought to light. Russia has still not provided any credible explanation.

I would like to reaffirm France's full confidence in the work of the Secretariat and its Director-General, who work daily to carry out the Organisation's missions. The OPCW must remain the universal repository of knowledge regarding chemical weapons and their destruction. We therefore encourage the Secretariat to actively pursue its efforts with regard to knowledge management in order to maintain and update its valuable expertise. To this end, we also welcome the constructive discussions about reforming the human resources management policy. The policy should allow the Director-General to be more flexible when it is in the interest of the Organisation.

We have all noticed it: the pandemic that we have been experiencing for more than a year has forced us to adapt our working methods. It is essential to identify solutions together to put the Organisation in a position to implement its mandate, including under exceptional circumstances. We therefore support the initiative in this respect launched by Germany, as well as the ongoing consultation process, and we encourage the Secretariat to explore technical possibilities for virtual meetings. It is necessary to ensure the continuity of our work, a fundamental goal that we all share as States Parties to the Convention.

The OPCW is a fundamental pillar of our collective security. France has long supported the Organisation. This is why we have decided to make voluntary financial contributions to various programmes, ranging from activities in Syria to cybersecurity and activities linked to international cooperation and assistance. I would also like to mention a contribution to the future Centre for Chemistry and Technology, which will allow for the call for funding to be closed and for construction works to be initiated. All of these efforts contribute to a world free from chemical weapons, which is the objective that unites us all as States Parties and the *raison d'être* of this Organisation.

I would ask that this statement be considered as an official document of this session of the Council and that it be published on the OPCW extranet and public website.

Thank you.