

*'Check against delivery'*

Statement by H.E. Ambassador René Miko, Permanent Representative of the  
Czech Republic to the OPCW

at the One-Hundred Seventh Session of the Executive Council

8-11 October 2024

Mr Chairperson, Mr Director-General, distinguished delegates,

The Czech Republic fully aligns itself with the statement of the European Union and would like to use this opportunity to make a few remarks in its national capacity.

First of all, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to you, Excellency, dear Ambassador Teran Parral, for the preparatory efforts and able guidance that allows us to conduct this session of the Executive Council.

Allow me also to commend the Director General, Fernando Arias, and the Technical Secretariat for all the hard work during the intersessional period. We reiterate our full confidence in you, Director General, and in your staff. We highly appreciate your professionalism, impartiality, independence and immense technical expertise.

Mr Chairperson,

Czechia welcomes the destruction of all declared chemical weapons in July last year. But it is now more important than ever to prevent the re-emergence of chemical weapons. In this context, retention and transfer of relevant knowledge, skills and expertise is crucial for the future work of the Organisation.

With respect to the capacity-building, Czechia is a staunch supporter of the OPCW in general and of protection and assistance activities based on Article X of the Convention in particular. Our long-term support is both financial and in-kind by providing voluntary contributions earmarked for Africa programme and conducting trainings with mostly African participants (from Uganda, Kenya, Burundi, Tanzania) respectively. Recognizing the need to enhance preparedness and response capacities of Ukraine in the event of a chemical incident or its threat, Czechia provided voluntary contribution in order to fulfil this aim. We are pleased that a second technical assistance visit to Ukraine delivered necessary protective equipment and provided training on its use. We look forward to further cooperation with the Secretariat on enhancing the preparedness and response capacities of other States too.

Yet we are far from prevention of re-emergence of chemical weapons. Czechia remains gravely concerned about the increasing reports of possible use of Riot Control Agents by Russia on the Ukrainian battlefield which is strictly prohibited under the Chemical Weapons Convention. For this reason we have joined Germany and other ten states to call upon Russia to clarify the situation. In our last Note Verbale of 1 July 2024 we requested the newly constituted Executive Council to assist in clarifying the situation related to the reports pursuant to Article IX para 3 of the Convention. We remind that Russia has, like many others, ratified the Convention and pledged their full adherence to its stipulations. Unfortunately until today we haven't received any substantiated clarifications from Russia. To the contrary, we have witnessed false accusations which are part of a broader disinformation campaign. Such a spread of disinformation is not new to us. Already in case of poisoning of Mr Alexei Navalny, the Russian opposition leader, by a chemical nerve agent of the Novichok group in 2020, we heard similar narratives. We are strongly concerned about recent news that Navalny's tragic death this year might have been staged and that he was likely poisoned again. We repeat calls on Russia to fully cooperate with the OPCW to ensure an impartial international investigation.

And let's not forget confirmed use of chemicals weapons by Syria against its own population. It was again Russia spreading disinformation regarding such use which was confirmed by, inter alia, the UN-OPCW JIM, and OPCW IIT after a comprehensive, independent, impartial and thorough investigation. This is all the more worrying as Syria has been attributed already on nine occasions with the use of chemical weapons. We resolutely condemn the use of chemical weapons by Assad's troops as well as ISIL or other non-state actors and we remain committed to ensure accountability of the perpetrators.

We believe that all perpetrators of the chemical weapons use shall be held accountable and that is also why Czechia met with other States to discuss how to enhance such criminal accountability.

Mr. Chairperson,

Czechia appreciates the work of the OPCW on the Syrian dossier. Unfortunately, after more than 10 years it could not have been closed due to the continued limited cooperation of Syria with the Technical Secretariat. And what is even more worrying that two new outstanding issues were opened in July this year. The issue at hand is serious. Samples of undeclared toxic chemicals have been collected by DAT and analysed. We are talking about thousands of tons of undeclared toxic chemicals. Especially we are concerned about possibly undeclared production, storage and weaponisation of chemical warfare agents. We regret that it was not possible for DAT to conduct a full round of consultations in September. We remind that cooperation is one of the cornerstones of the Convention. Therefore, we continue to call on the Syrian Arab Republic to fully and effectively cooperate with the Technical Secretariat and provide a complete declaration.

It is our common responsibility to uphold the Convention and our obligations stemming therefrom. Czechia is a reliable and responsible member of the OPCW which fulfils its obligation from the Convention. Because we want to engage actively in the work of the Organisation, we have decided to submit our candidacy for the membership of the Executive Council for the period 2025-2027.

Mr Chairperson,

I would like to ask that this statement be designed an official document of this Council session and posted on both the external server and public website.

I thank you.