

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR THOMAS SCHIEB, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF
GERMANY TO THE OPCW, AT THE 107th SESSION OF
THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

(The Hague, 8 – 11 October 2024)

Mr. Chairperson, Director-General, distinguished Ambassadors and delegates,

Germany aligns itself with the statement delivered by the Permanent Representative of Hungary on behalf of the EU.

We wish the Chairperson of the Executive Council, H.E. Ambassador Andres Teran Parral, all the best for chairing the October Council session.

Two weeks ago, the UN “Summit of the Future” in New York in a remarkable show of unity of almost all UN Member states and many World Leaders, adopted a “Pact for the Future”, facilitated by Germany and Namibia, in which they expressed *“serious concern at the increasing number of actions that are contrary to existing international norms and non-compliance with obligations in the field of disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation”*. And they issued a strong pledge to *“pursue a world free from chemical ... weapons and ensure that those responsible for any use of these weapons are identified and held accountable”*.

And indeed, as much as the successful completion of the destruction of declared chemical stockpiles last year is a reason to celebrate, the harsh reality is that the world is far from being free from chemical weapons, that the CWC is under a lot of pressure and that bringing the perpetrators of chemical weapons use to justice remains an enormous challenge:

- For many months Russia has been blatantly violating the CWC by using riot control agents as a method of warfare as well as other toxic chemicals, like the scheduled choking agent chloropicrin, in its war of aggression against Ukraine;
- at Executive Council meetings, Russia, although invited to provide explanations several times, has chosen not to co-operate with the OPCW and help clarify the violations but instead is responding to these allegations with the usual mix of denial, distraction and disinformation;

- Russian authorities have still not allowed an independent investigation into the poisoning of Alexey Navalny with the nerve agent Novichok in 2020 in Russia. Nor has any light been shed on the circumstances of his sudden death in February this year, which raises very serious new questions. The only thing we know for sure is that Alexey Navalny had to die because he symbolized the fight for a free and democratic Russia.
- Syria's non-compliance and possibly continued CW programs are deeply worrying as is the fact that the number of open issues in Syria's initial declaration have recently increased again;
- It is obvious that the risk of a re-emergence of Chemical Weapons remains present and is potentially aggravated by emerging technologies, including AI.

All this shows why it is so important for the OPCW to remain fit for purpose.

The very basic requirement in this regard is for the OPCW to have the necessary means to carry out all its program activities. This is why the decision for the revision of the 2025 budget needs to be adopted without any further delay, and the assessed contributions need to be paid in full and in time.

Given its potentially enormous impact on the work of the OPCW, the topic of emerging technologies needs to be high on the organization's agenda. We welcome that the EC will regularly discuss this important topic. The intersessional periods should be used to intensify the exchange between the Technical Secretariat, States Parties and the scientific community as well as the chemical industry on the respective developments in science and technology. I am particularly pleased that the Berlin conference on "AI and WMD" on 28 June helped to kick-start this discussion, and we commend Morocco and the TS for carrying this process forward and for preparing the OPCW's high-level conference on AI in Rabat later this month.

From Germany's perspective, it is vital that this process is inclusive and as beneficial for all participants as possible. In this context, I would like to again quote the declaration of the "Summit of the Future", according to which UN Member States decided – and I quote – to "enhance international cooperation and capacity-building efforts in order to bridge the digital divides and ensure that all States can safely and securely seize the benefits of digital technologies". This of course should also apply to the OPCW and the States Parties to the CWC.

At the same time, the OPCW still has to do a lot of heavy-lifting related to activities that happened many decades ago, in particular dealing with the issue of “Abandoned Chemical Weapons” as well as “Old Chemical Weapons”.

Germany commends the governments of China and Japan for organizing and hosting a successful visit of the EC to China in September, giving EC members the opportunity to witness the enormous efforts currently being undertaken and the progress made in destroying the CW abandoned by Japan on Chinese territory in the 1940s.

Enormous amounts of “Old Chemical Weapons” are still buried in many countries. In the Northern German town of Munster excavations of thousands of OCW are being conducted in cooperation with the TS. It is a huge and very challenging operation, the world-wide biggest currently under way for OCW. These weapons had been dumped and buried in a small lake at the end of WWII. Since we think that it would be interesting for the EC to visit the project as well as the nearby destruction facility, run by the company GEKA, Germany would like to invite the EC to visit Munster next spring. We will share more information on this shortly.

Mr. Chairperson,

The challenge of remaining fit for purpose pertains of course also to the core task of the organization, namely verification and in particular industry verification. In this regard, Germany would like to express its appreciation for the constructive work on very complex issues being carried out in the Industry Cluster under the chairmanship of her Excellency, Ambassador Abdelhak of Algeria, and facilitated by Germany. One such issue is a modified approach to Schedule 2 plant selection for inspections, a highly relevant topic for the OPCW, since it aims at improving the prioritizing of industry plants for inspections and solving the existing backlog at the same time – while under the budgetary provision which puts a cap on the number of such inspections. This is an excellent example of constructive cooperation among States Parties, and we would like to express our gratitude for their engagement and contributions.

Last but not least, the performance of the non-career organization OPCW very much depends on the highly qualified staff at the Technical Secretariat. While we welcome the ongoing efforts to improve the geographical diversity of the staff, we are convinced that the organization would also significantly benefit from rendering its tenure policy more flexible.

In order not to lose extremely valuable expertise and knowledge to the private sector or other international organizations, the OPCW should be able to re-hire not only inspectors, but – to a limit extent and for a limited period - experts as well. We are optimistic that a reasonable solution exists in this context.

Concluding, I would like to commend the Director-General, H.E. Ambassador Fernando Arias, and the Technical Secretariat for ensuring the effective implementation of the mandate of the OPCW. The Director-General and the Technical Secretariat can continue counting on Germany's unwavering support and active role in promoting the work of the OPCW.

I would kindly ask you to consider this statement as an official document of this session and post it on the OPCW external server and public website.
