

STATEMENT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION
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PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF HUNGARY TO THE OPCW
AT THE 107th SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL
(The Hague, 8 – 11 October 2024)

Agenda item 6 (c) – Elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme

I have the honour of speaking on behalf of the European Union.

The Candidate Countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, North Macedonia, Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, Türkiye and Ukraine as well as the EFTA (European Free Trade Association) countries Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, members of the EEA (European Economic Area) align themselves with this statement. Andorra, Monaco and San Marino also associate themselves with this statement.

Mr. Chairperson,

The European Union takes note of the Director-General's report (EC-107/DG.8) regarding work on eliminating the Syrian Chemical Weapons Programme and the informative pre-Council briefing by the Secretariat. We deeply regret the complete lack of progress: more than a decade after Syria's initial declaration, 19 questions remain unresolved; it is even more concerning that two additional questions were recently opened. Recent Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) findings suggest a potentially even more extensive Syrian chemical weapons programme than known so far. We are also concerned that recent DAT had to deploy a reduced team to Syria and thus was not in a position to conduct any field visit as planned. Syria must fully and effectively cooperate with the OPCW and all its established mechanisms, including the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT).

The European Union rejects criticism of the IIT by a few States Parties that call its creation "illegal" or "illegitimate". We underline that majority voting is explicitly foreseen in the Convention if consensus is impossible to find. A State Party joining the CWC is subscribing to its rules, including as regards majority voting and budgetary consequences of these votes. Once taken, all States Parties are bound by a decision, there are no exceptions and no cherry-picking. The four reports issued so far demonstrate the professionalism and independence with which the IIT carries out its missions, regardless of which perpetrator has been identified.

Mr. Chairperson,

The continued non-compliance of the Syrian regime causes serious damage to the object and purpose of the Convention. The Conference therefore decided at its 28th Session on additional measures related to, inter alia, transfers of scheduled chemicals, their pre-cursors and

equipment to Syria and elsewhere (cf. C-28/DEC/CRP.12). Full implementation of this decision will be crucial to prevent any future use of chemical weapons in Syria. It also encourages increased cooperation to tackle the threat of chemical weapons use by non-state actors, including terrorist groups.

The Decision adopted by the 25th Conference of the States Parties suspending the voting rights and other privileges of the Syrian Arab Republic sends a strong message against impunity for the use of chemical weapons, and in defence of international law, including international humanitarian law, as well as the integrity of the Convention. It was an appropriate response by the Conference to the clear violations by the Syrian regime of the Convention and its core principles. In order for its voting rights and privileges to be restored, the Syrian regime needs to resolve all pending issues, declare the full extent of its chemical weapons programme, and return to full compliance in accordance with its obligations under UNSC Resolution 2118 and the CWC.

Mr. Chairperson,

Chemical weapons use has been independently attributed to the Syrian regime on nine occasions by the thorough and comprehensive investigations carried out by the UN and the OPCW. The European Union has imposed restrictive measures on high-level Syrian regime officials and scientists as well as entities for their role in the development and use of chemical weapons. We are ready to consider introducing further measures as appropriate.

The European Union is committed to ensuring full accountability for those responsible for these heinous crimes in Syria and beyond, including through the International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons. We have taken note of the establishment of a cross-regional working group to advance proposals for international criminal accountability for documented chemical weapons use, and look forward to concrete proposals for addressing impunity.

I would kindly ask you to consider this statement as an official document of this session.

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