

**The 108th Session of the Executive Council of
the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)
General Debate
Statement by Ms. Hyejeong Ahn
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Mr. Chair,
Mr. Director-General,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

At the outset, I sincerely thank the Chair Ambassador Andrés Terán Parral for preparing this meeting. I also extend my deep appreciation to the Director-General Fernando Arias and the Secretariat staff for all their hard work.

Mr. Chair,

For the past decade, the issue of Syria’s chemical weapons has remained unresolved due to the previous regime’s lack of cooperation. However, recent political developments have created an unprecedented opportunity to finally address this dossier. In this regard, we welcome the Director-General’s visit to Syria on February 8 and the Syrian interim government’s designation of a focal point to handle the chemical weapons issue. We also commend the Permanent Representation of Qatar for taking its role as a channel of communication between OPCW and Syria.

The complete elimination of Syria’s chemical weapons program represents a crucial step towards a world free of chemical weapons. To achieve this goal, it is essential for the Secretariat to identify, access, and verify the chemical weapons-related sites and facilities. In this regard, the ROK welcomes the new Syrian authorities’ commitment to implementing the CWC (Chemical Weapons Convention). We look forward to accomplishing tangible results through cooperation between Syria and the Secretariat. We hope that this opportunity will lead to the complete destruction of chemical weapons in Syria, which have caused so much suffering to the Syrian people.

The ROK reaffirms its full supports to the OPCW Syria teams including DAT (Declaration and Assessment Team), FFM (Fact Finding Mission) and IIT (Investigation and Identification Team). We must also stress that the recent developments in Syria do not excuse those responsible for past chemical weapons use from being held accountable. Allowing impunity for such use only risks encouraging further violations.

Mr. Chair,

Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which has been ongoing for the past three years, has heightened concerns over the possible misuse of toxic chemicals, including the use of riot control agents (RCAs) as a method of warfare. In particular, we express our deep concerns about the recent second TAV (Technical Assistance Visit) report which has confirmed the presence of CS, a riot control agent, on the battlefield in Ukraine. Any use of chemical weapons, including the use of RCAs as a method of warfare, is strictly prohibited under Article I of the Convention. We appreciate the TS' efforts for releasing this report, and call on the TS to maintain its readiness to continue providing its assistance to State Parties through its independent expertise.

Mr. Chair,

To address the many challenges the OPCW is facing, including the issues related to Syria and Ukraine, it is crucial for the Secretariat to have experienced staff with relevant knowledge and expertise. In this regard, the ROK supports the proposed amendment of the OPCW tenure policy, which allows rehiring of former staff members on an exceptional basis. We also underline the need to take into consideration of wide geographical representation and gender balance in the recruitment process.

Achieving a world free of chemical weapons is not solely the responsibility of the Secretariat; it can only be realized through the collective efforts of all States Parties. Therefore, strengthening the capacity of States Parties is of utmost importance. The Republic of Korea has been hosting annual Seoul Workshop for the past 12 years to facilitate the sharing of best practices among Asian State Parties. As a part of our ongoing efforts, we have extended our financial support to an African fellowship program at the ChemTech Centre aimed at strengthening the bio-toxin analysis capabilities of African laboratories. We hope that all these efforts will create synergy and contribute to the CWC evolving into an even more successful disarmament convention.

Last but not least, the Korean government reiterates the significance of universality of the Convention. We can be assured all chemical arsenals have been declared and destroyed only when the States outside the Convention accede to the CWC and take on its responsibility accordingly. In this regard, we urge the four remaining States not Party, including the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), to join the Convention as early as possible without preconditions.

Thank you. /END/