

Statement to the twenty-seventh session of the conference of the States Parties

Director-General, Mr Chair, Distinguished Delegates,

I would like to thank Director-General Arias and the Technical Secretariat for all their work in preparing for this Conference. Many thanks as well to our Chairperson, Ambassador Madonsela.

I am very sorry not to be with you in person, but I am required to be in London for important business in Parliament.

In April, we marked the 25th anniversary of the Chemical Weapons Convention coming into force. During its first quarter century, the OPCW has made enormous strides in ridding the world of chemical weapons.

There is more to come. The UK is a proud contributor to the new Centre for Chemistry and Technology and we are looking forward to its inauguration next year.

With the completion of destruction of declared stockpiles in sight, next year's Review Conference is particularly timely. And there is much still to discuss in order to prepare the ground for the Review Conference.

Mr Chair,

The United Kingdom is not complacent about the challenges ahead. This Organisation remains as relevant as ever and there is much still to do.

The OPCW has an important role to play in helping States Parties build capacity to implement the Convention. The UK is proud to provide a further voluntary contribution of seven hundred thousand pounds this year in support of this aim.

And we call on all States Parties to support the proposed modest budget revision. Whilst recognising the global economic headwinds, we encourage all States Parties to pay their assessed contributions on time and in full. Late payments have a direct and material impact on whether the Technical Secretariat can deliver its planned activities.

Mr Chair,

Despite progress on destruction, serious verification challenges remain.

Unfortunately, a small number of States Parties have broken the rules of the Convention in a blatant and outrageous manner.

Russia's use of Novichok in the United Kingdom in 2018 was horrific. A public

inquiry is on-going into the circumstances of Dawn Sturgess' tragic death. Three Russian nationals have been charged with chemical weapons offences.

The Russian state has also used chemical weapons within their own borders. Alexey Navalny's poisoning with a nerve agent in 2020 was appalling, as was Russia's subsequent attempted cover-up. I call on Russia to provide substantive answers to the questions posed by 45 States Parties under Article IX of the Convention. Russia must account for and give up its chemical weapons programme.

Mr Chair,

The United Kingdom condemns Russia's unjustifiable and illegal invasion of Ukraine.

We have all heard Russian-linked separatist figures making disturbing remarks in Ukraine about supporting chemical weapons use to support war aims. We have all seen Russia's irresponsible attacks near Ukraine's civil chemical facilities. And we have all experienced Russia's malicious disinformation campaigns about chemical weapons. We have seen this pattern of deceitful behaviour in Syria and now we are seeing it in Ukraine. In this context, Russia's war is not something we can ignore here in the OPCW.

Mr Chair,

Syria is another State Party showing disregard for the rules.

The Syrian authorities have undeniably used chemical weapons against their own people on multiple occasions.

The Syrian authorities have not resolved all the glaring omissions in its initial declaration. Thousands of munitions are missing. Hundreds of tonnes of agent are missing.

In 2021, OPCW States signalled their concern and the Syrian regime's response was to limit its cooperation with the OPCW even further. It is a lamentable situation.

Syria must comply with UN Security Council Resolution 2118. Syria must live up to its obligations. Syria must immediately give up its chemical weapons programme in full.

Mr Chair,

In 1997 the convention came into force with the vow to eliminate an entire category of weapons of mass destruction.

25 years on and much has been achieved.

But we know we still have a long way to go.

And that is why we must continue to offer the OPCW our full support and make sure it has the resources it needs to deliver on the goal of a world free of

chemical weapons.

Thank you Mr Chair.