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FRANCE

**STATEMENT BY MR SÉBASTIEN BRAHA
DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF FRANCE TO THE OPCW AT THE
EIGHTY-FIRST SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairperson,

France of course associates itself with the statement made by our colleague from the Netherlands on behalf of the European Union.

As this is the last regular session of the Council that you are presiding, I should like to begin by praising your work, your professionalism, and your commitment throughout this past year. Your wisdom and sense of humour have enabled this Council to carry out its discussions under the best possible conditions and to adopt its decisions in the spirit of consensus that is characteristic of this Organisation. For all of these reasons, I should like to express our sincere thanks. This Council will be sad to see you leave as Chairperson, but knows that it can have every confidence in your successor.

This Council is meeting in regular session for the first time since last October. Despite the completion in January of the work to destroy the weapons declared by the Syrian Government, it is once again Syria that accounts for a large part of our work and presents the greatest challenge for our Organisation. As Da'esh continues to expand its influence, against a backdrop in which the Syrian Government's oppression helped it to emerge, in particular with the systematic and repeated use of chemical weapons by the regime in Damascus against its own population, we must once again be equal to the task entrusted to us by the international community: to ensure that chemical weapons can no longer be used in Syria and to eliminate any risk of their re-emergence.

This is why we must answer the following question as a matter of priority: has the Syrian Government declared and destroyed its entire chemical programme? As the Council noted during its last session, there are serious concerns regarding the inaccuracies, inconsistencies, and contradictions in the Syrian declarations. Despite what has been made clear by the evidence gathered by the Declaration Assessment Team during its missions, the Syrian Government continues its obstructionist ways, by giving answers that are inadequate and by telling tall tales that change and are altered with each new piece of evidence presented by the Technical Secretariat. And while the Syrian authorities may boast for having extended their cooperation by presenting testimonies, often contradictory as it happens, the reality is a different story entirely: it is now clear that the Syrian Government is not cooperating in a manner that is satisfactory, even though the Council's decision of 27 September 2013 and United Nations Security Council resolution 2118 (2013) oblige it to do so.



The report presented by the Director-General at the request of this Council sheds light on Syria's futile attempts to shirk its responsibilities. This report should have allowed us to close certain chapters. But what is the situation today? Still more questions and disturbing new developments, such as the presence of chemicals that Syria never declared, or the discovery of containers, also never declared. The list is longer now than it was in October. And Syria has gone so far as to question the results of the analyses of samples by laboratories certified by the OPCW. This Organisation was built on consensus and cooperation, and on the assurance that its expertise cannot be called into question. Such practices have isolated the Syrian Government and do not honour it. When all of the indisputable technical evidence, sample analyses, and conclusions by universally recognised experts are stacked up, Syria must understand that it has but one choice left: to cooperate, to provide all of the answers expected, and to allow the Technical Secretariat to ensure that the entire Syrian chemical weapons programme has been dismantled as quickly as possible.

But this is not the case today. Today, we can no longer expect that Syria will provide us with what it has been incapable of providing us after two years of consultations. We must act. The draft decision presented by the United States of America will give us this possibility. It would seem inconceivable for the Council to remain silent in view of the conclusions in the Director-General's Note, especially since the Council mandated him to present it. France therefore supports this draft decision, and trusts in the sense of responsibility of the members of the Council. The complete and verified dismantling of the Syrian chemical arsenal is a fundamental objective, and provides assurance for the future, because it limits any future attempts to rebuild the capacities, as well as any risk of non-State actors acquiring and using that arsenal.

In parallel with this threat, the cases of allegations of use and the proven use of chemical weapons in Syria continue. France condemns these barbaric acts in the strongest terms.

On the other hand, early in the year France made an exceptional contribution to the work of the Organisation: EUR 250,000 were set aside for operations related to the Fact-Finding Mission and Declaration Assessment Team, and EUR 250,000 were made available to the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism, whose next reports we look forward to receiving. France will continue to provide its full support to all of this work, because the lives of innocent civilians and the credibility of the Organisation depend on it. It is essential that those found responsible for having used chemical weapons be brought to justice.

At the same time, France would recall the financial responsibilities incumbent upon the Syrian authorities for the verification and destruction activities. Failure to meet those responsibilities, including by systematically refusing the solutions proposed by the European Union, is quite simply unacceptable.

While France condemns the use of chemical weapons by anyone and under any circumstances, we should like to praise the unique cooperation that allowed for the provision of quality technical assistance by the Technical Secretariat, following the request by the Iraqi authorities. The report presented by Iraq, the conclusions of which are its own, should give us a glimpse of the new possibilities for the OPCW in terms of cooperation. France considers that it would be appropriate to draw all of the useful operational conclusions and to see to what extent such a system could be repeated in future.

As we have seen, the threat of use of chemical weapons remains. Indeed, the Council held a special meeting on 24 February in order to prevent any additional risk. The request for assistance by the Libyan National Authority was received, and the decision adopted by the Council allowed the Technical Secretariat to launch consultations with all of the interested parties to help Libya secure the stockpiles stored at the Ruwagha site. Libya should have completed the destruction of these stockpiles before the end of 2016, as it had previously pledged and in accordance with its obligations under the Convention.

In the current context, the destruction of these category 2 weapons presents a new challenge for the Organisation. The technical consultations that have taken place thus far have allowed for the identification of several possibilities, the feasibility of which needs to be evaluated in the light of the security situation. We all hope to help Libya complete the destruction of these chemicals, and we all hope that the option selected will offer more security than uncertainty. This option should also take account of the legal and logistical factors underpinning such an operation.

As we can see, the security challenges are many and the Organisation, in view of its competences, has a duty to respond. No one doubts that the issues concerning re-emergence will be part of the future priorities of the Organisation. As the mission to destroy declared stockpiles will come to an end in the coming years, it is important for the OPCW to be capable of facing these new challenges. These can be met only by maintaining credible expertise, both in the areas of verification and inspections. Only this expertise will allow the OPCW to play a leading role in this area. But this expertise can be useful only if the States Parties assume their part of responsibilities in this process, in particular with regard to Article VII of the Convention.

The rapid evolution of science and the convergence of biology and chemistry have rightly been highlighted in the recent recommendations of the Scientific Advisory Board. France will play its full role in the consultations process recently undertaken with the stakeholders on this issue.

In any case, the creation of an open-ended working group will make it possible to answer all of these questions. France therefore supports the creation of this working group on the future priorities of the OPCW, in accordance with the request of the Conference of the States Parties at its session last December.

France also welcomes the establishment of the Advisory Board on Education and Outreach, and will actively participate in its work and activities.

In closing, I should like to underscore each State Party's duty to enable the Organisation to function by paying their contributions on time. It is incumbent upon the countries in arrears to meet their obligations as soon as possible. It is also incumbent upon the States Parties concerned to reimburse the OPCW for activities conducted under Articles IV and V of the Convention.

Today, the financial equilibrium of the Organisation is under threat, and we must consider all necessary measures to remedy this situation. In this context, France reiterates its full support for the Director-General and all of the initiatives of the Technical Secretariat aimed at preventing the situation from getting worse.

I thank you for your attention and would request that this statement be considered as an official document of this session of the Executive Council.

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