Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons: 89th Session of the Executive Council

2018-10-09

Thank you Madame Chair and welcome Director General to your first meeting of the Executive Council in your new role.

I want right at the outset to pay tribute to the assistance provided by the Technical Secretariat over the summer in response to the Amesbury incident.Their work was swift, meticulous, and fully in accordance with the assistance provisions set out in the Convention.

I am also very grateful to the Technical Secretariat for briefing all States Parties on 13 September about their findings. Their independent analysis confirmed the conclusions of United Kingdom’s scientific experts; that the toxic chemical was a military-grade nerve agent of the type known as Novichok. This was the same nerve agent that was used in the attack on the Skripals in March, and in this instance, resulted in the death of Dawn Sturgess, and the severe injury of Charlie Rowley.

On 5 September I updated the Director-General on developments with the independent UK police investigation, specifically that the police had set out detailed evidence culminating in charges of attempted murder, and the use and possession of a chemical weapon, being brought against two agents of the Russian state. We will continue our efforts to bring them to justice. Meanwhile Russia has sought to obfuscate through increasingly desperate fabrication.

Madame Chair,

It is unlikely to be a coincidence that around the time that the

OPCW

was analysing substances from the Salisbury attack and starting investigations into chemical weapons use in Douma the offices of the

OPCW

, where we are sitting today, were targeted by a hostile cyber operation carried out by the Russian military intelligence service, the GRU. I pay tribute to the Dutch intelligence security

services, working in partnership with the UK, for moving so swiftly to disrupt the operation and help safeguard this organisation and all of its confidential information.The GRU agents planned onward travel to Switzerland and one of the

OPCW

’s Designated Laboratories. This aggressive act demonstrated contempt for the

OPCW

and its work to eradicate chemical weapons, as well as complete disregard for international norms and the institutions which help to keep all of our citizens safe. We must protect them.

Tragically the threat of CW use still looms large, particularly in Syria, where thousands have been killed and injured since 2012. The UK welcomes the Government of Turkey’s successful efforts to prevent a reckless military offensive in north-west Syria. We call on Russia and Iran, as Astana Guarantors alongside Turkey, to ensure that this ceasefire is fully respected.

We remain concerned at the potential for chemical weapons use by the Syrian regime in the event of any future military action. Despite Syria’s obligation under the Chemical Weapons Convention to stop using chemical weapons, the

OPCW

-UN JIM has found the Syrian regime responsible for four chemical weapons attacks. The Declaration Assessment Team, after more than four years of patient and persistent work, continues to find gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies in Syria’s Declaration.

It is time to take forward vital attribution work where the Fact Finding Mechanism has identified chemical weapons use in Syria. Attributing responsibility for these repugnant acts will help deter further chemical weapons attacks. We are grateful for the DG’s report of 4 October on implementation of the Decision taken at the special conference of states parties in June. We welcome the news that the

OPCW

has signed a Memorandum on information sharing with the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism, as the Director General has just told us. We also look forward to seeing the DG’s proposals for progressing paragraphs 18, 20 and 21 of the June Decision.

Madame Chair, the Chemical Weapons Convention membership took a big step forward in June when we came together to condemn chemical weapons use and show our support for the Convention. Our focus now must be on implementing the measures agreed.

That brings me to the ongoing budget negotiations.

Whilst the UK favours budget discipline across the international system, we also recognise that where we face new threats we must ensure that the institutions which combat them are funded to do their job. That is why we support an increase to the

OPCW

’s regular budget and have already pledged an additional £1 million to help the

OPCW

with implementation of the June Decision.The funds will include support for the development of the new

OPCW

Laboratory and enhancement of the network of Designated Laboratories. It is also clear that the

OPCW

must take the threat of hostile cyber-attacks very seriously, this will have some budget implications.

The upcoming Review Conference provides an opportunity to reflect on the last five years of the work of this organisation and set direction for the next five years. We must face up to the reality that our hard-won gains against the scourge of chemical weapons are being challenged like never before. We must stand together against chemical weapons use, and we must ensure that the

OPCW

and our new Director-General have the tools they need to face the next five years.

Thank you.

Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/organisation-for-the-prohibition-of-chemical-weapons-89th-session-of-the-executive-council