Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

88th Executive Council session of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons

2018-07-10

Madame Chair, Director General,

The United Kingdom supports the statement made by the Ambassador of Austria on behalf of the European Union.

With a heavy heart, I must begin by updating this Council on the major incident in Amesbury, in the United Kingdom. On 30 June two people were hospitalised in Salisbury. Charlie Rowley remains critically ill in hospital and tragically, two days ago, Dawn Sturgess died. This is shocking and appalling news. The UK police have now launched a murder inquiry and are working around the clock to bring those responsible to account. On 4 July tests confirmed both individuals had been exposed to a Novichok nerve agent, the same substance that contaminated Yulia and Sergei Skripal on 4 March; the same substance that was identified by the technical experts of the OPCW. We informed the OPCW early on Thursday 5 July and I updated the Director General again yesterday. We are grateful for the OPCW's offer of further assistance, if requested. We will keep the Technical Secretariat and this Council informed of developments.

Turning to other recent events, the membership of the Chemical Weapons Convention came together in unprecedented numbers last month to send a very strong message of support for the Convention. We heard loudly and clearly that the use of chemical weapons would not be tolerated and that there can be no impunity for those that disregard the ban. Over three-quarters of those present and voting supported the Decision taken. The Technical Secretariat (TS) is working to deliver on the mandate, starting with identifying those responsible for chemical weapons attacks in Syria.

Madame Chair, the TS now needs to work swiftly and transparently to develop proposals to strengthen verification and chemical security; enhance the capability of the Secretariat; and to provide technical expertise to identify those responsible for chemical weapons use. As the CSP confirmed, technical attribution and determination of compliance are clearly provided for in the Convention. States parties must come together at the November CSP to agree next steps and ensure chemical weapons use is consigned firmly to history.

The CSP approved increased OPCW assistance to address chemical terrorism and support secure, innovative and productive chemical industries. To that end, the UK announced yesterday an additional £1 million to assist the implementation of the Decision and support the OPCW's work to uphold non-proliferation and disarmament.

In the last week we have seen two more people suffer as a result of nerve agent use in my own country, one of whom has tragically died. The Fact-Finding Mission has now confirmed the use of sarin in Ltamenah, Syria on 24 March 2017 as well as on 30 March 2017. It is extremely disturbing that the samples from 24 March were consistent with the sarin used by Syria in Khan Shaykhun on 4 April 2017, as reported by the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism and condemned by the recent CSP.

The FFM has also reported chlorine use on 25 March 2017 in Ltamenah and on 4 February 2018 in Saraqib. Only last Friday the FFM published an interim report on the devastating chemical weapons attack on 7 April in Douma, Syria in which up to 75 people were killed. The report states that chlorinated organic chemicals were found, along with residues of explosive. Incontrovertible evidence of the use of chemical weapons in Syria continues to mount. It has got to stop. Attributing responsibility for these repugnant acts is a step in the right direction.

I wish to end by paying my own tribute to the Director General for his eight years of dedicated service. Ambassador Uzumcu has led the Technical Secretariat with distinction in these testing times. He leaves a strong legacy as his own thoughtful remarks just now demonstrated, like him I look forward with optimism and hope for this organisation. The UK looks forward to welcoming Ambassador Arias as his successor later this month, confident that the critical work of upholding the Convention is in safe hands.

Thank you Madam Chair.

Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/88th-executive-council-session-of-the-organisation-for-the-prohibition-of-chemical-weapons