Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

Baroness Goldie speech at 24th Conference of States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention

2019-11-25

Director General, ladies and gentlemen. May I extend Congratulations to you, Mr Chairman, on your election and to Director-General Arias and his team for all the work in preparing for this Conference.

Mr Chairman, the United Kingdom fully supports the statement made by the European Union this morning.

It is now over 100 years since the horrors of the First World War - a conflict in which my late father fought. The global community's revulsion at the use of chemical weapons in that conflict first propelled nations to come together and try to ban them. Just over 20 years ago we collectively took a huge step forward with the enactment of the Chemical Weapons Convention, paving the way for verified destruction of all declared stockpiles – a process now close to completion.

The OPCW has, rightly, been lauded for this historic achievement and has taken its place as an integral part of the rules based international system; not only verifying destruction but inspecting industrial activity and supporting states to fully implement the convention's provisions.

Whilst the threat of chemical weapons use never fully disappeared, sadly and regrettably it reared its ugly head again with confirmed use in the conflict in Syria, as well as in Malaysia, Iraq and indeed in my own country, the United Kingdom. Ladies and gentlemen, the UK will not stand idly by in the face of chemical weapons attacks.

In response the international community came together again in June 2018 and unequivocally reaffirmed that all chemical weapons use was abhorrent. Not only was the use of chemical weapons condemned, we also agreed that measures should be put in place to identify those responsible for the appalling chemical weapons attacks in Syria. There must never be impunity for such crimes.

The OPCW has now been working diligently on Syria and its chemical weapons programme for over six years. The UK remains gravely concerned at Syria's failure to address the significant outstanding questions with its Declaration. There are serious and substantial gaps

and deficiencies that Syria has so far failed to account for. Under professional and expert scrutiny by the Technical Secretariat, Syria has nevertheless slowly and grudgingly acknowledged more and more chemical weapons activities. We call on Syria to fully implement the provisions of the convention and its obligations never, under any circumstances, to develop, retain or use chemical weapons.

Ladies and gentlemen, the United Kingdom has full confidence that the women and men of the Technical Secretariat, including the members of the Fact-Finding Mission, Declaration Assessment Team and Investigation and Identification Team, will continue to conduct their work professionally, thoroughly and impartially. We look forward to receiving the IIT's first report in the near future. It will then be for us, the States Parties to decide how to respond.

In order for the OPCW to continue its vital work it first needs an adequate budget. The United Kingdom will be supporting the adoption of the Director General's proposed programme and budget, as recommended by the Executive Council by an overwhelming majority. Assessed contributions will not be increased in 2020 and we think the proposals to make use of the 2017 cash surplus are proportionate and are justified. The United Kingdom encourages all states to join consensus on the budget proposals when they are considered later this week.

The other priority for the United Kingdom is to see the successful adoption of the United States, Canadian and Dutch proposal to add two families of Novichok to the Convention's control lists. It is now over a year since this initiative was launched in response to the use of a nerve agent, with lethal effect, in Salisbury in the United Kingdom. It is imperative that the OPCW has the means to verify compliance with the convention in respect of these dangerous toxic chemicals.

Upholding the chemical weapons convention and underscoring the importance of rejecting all chemical weapons use wherever it occurs is not about picking sides – it is actually about working together united by a common objective of good to ensure that there is no place for chemical weapons in the twenty-first century. We urge all States Parties to support the vital efforts of the OPCW in achieving this shared aim.

Thank you very much indeed.

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