Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

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Thank you Chair and warm congratulations on your new role. Welcome also to the new Executive Council members. A very fond farewell to colleagues who are leaving. We will miss you.

Thank you Director General for your comprehensive statement.

The United Kingdom fully aligns with the statement made by the Ambassador of Finland on behalf of the European Union.

It is a year and a day since a British national, Dawn Sturgess, died following an appalling chemical weapons attack in my own country. Many thousands more have suffered terribly in Syria in recent years. The membership of this organisation came together in response in June 2018 and made emphatically clear that such actions would carry consequences. Real progress was made but there is more to do to strengthen the OPCW and uphold the legal commitments we all undertook when we ratified the convention.

We are disappointed that, since we last met, an objection was lodged to the Canadian, Dutch and US proposal to add two families of Novichok nerve agents to the Convention's Schedules. The proposal will now be taken up at the November Conference of States Parties, and we urge all States Parties to support its adoption.

Tragically the threat of chemical weapons use in Syria remains very real and we welcome the recent reports of the Director-General on Syria's chemical weapons programme. It is obvious that despite the Technical Secretariat's exhaustive efforts to implement Decisions made by this Council and the Conference of States Parties that serious problems remain.

Let us be clear, Syria bears full and sole responsibility for providing a complete Declaration – something it has failed to do for five long years. New aspects of Syria's chemical weapons programme continue to come to light, as catalogued in the most recent DAT reports. This only serves to underline our concern about the extent of Syria's undeclared chemical weapons programme. And now we learn that Syria is refusing to grant visas for Technical Secretariat staff to visit, in contravention of Articles seven and eight of the Convention, Decisions taken in this Council, and Security Council Resolution 2118.

Mr Chair, this is completely unacceptable. Syria insists that it has no chemical weapons programme - why then is it trying so hard to prevent those who have used chemical weapons on its territory from being identified? It is incumbent on all states parties to fully support the Technical Secretariat in delivering its mandate and that includes the work of Investigation and Identification Team. We stand ready to support the IIT in the months ahead as investigations progress and look forward to the first report issuing.

Mr Chair,

We welcome the fact that the Director-General presented a budget proposal last Friday. We note that it proposes zero nominal growth in terms of assessed contributions which is welcome. We particularly support the proposal to focus more on enhancing the capabilities of laboratories around the world - the UK is targeting some of our £1.1 million commitment to this important work this year.

Independent and trusted financial oversight is critical for any organisation. For that reason we will also be supporting efforts to reform and update the rules of procedure of the Advisory Body on Administrative and Financial Matters, to ensure it remains fit for purpose.

We are grateful to Ambassadors Gomez and Puja for convening consultations on the Director-General’s paper on ensuring a diverse and qualified workforce; as well as the proposal to establish a new Open Ended Working Group. We would of course need to have clarity on the purpose and mandate of any new working group in order to support it. The UK is ready to engage constructively with any specific suggestion, be it within the context of existing facilitations or outside them, in order to strengthen implementation of the Convention.

Thank you Mr Chair.

Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/91st-session-of-the-executive-council-of-the-opcw