EU Statement

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Mr. Chairman,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union.

Allow me to congratulate you on the assumption of your chairmanship of the First Committee and assure you of the European Union’s full cooperation and support.

We will participate in this year’s session with one major objective in mind: Upholding the integrity of the rules-based international system with effective multilateralism as a key principle and the United Nations at its core. This is indispensable for maintaining international peace and security.

We share the concern of the UN Secretary-General over the current security environment which is characterised by volatility, unpredictability and complexity. Bearing in mind the current severe and ever-changing security environment, we stress the need to preserve and further advance the general arms control and disarmament processes and call for further progress on all aspects of disarmament to enhance global security. The viability and effectiveness of non-proliferation, arms limitation and disarmament agreements require that those agreements be fully complied with and enforced. It is important that all parties contribute to improving the strategic context for arms control and disarmament and avoid eroding the rules-based multilateral system. We must endeavour to decrease tensions, restore dialogue and trust, explore further transparency and confidence-building measures, and move from confrontation to cooperation. Joint international efforts are required more than ever to solve global security challenges and regional conflicts.

We are gravely concerned about the continued non-compliance by some States with their non-proliferation obligations. As emphasised by the UN Secretary-General in his Agenda for Disarmament, the international community must ensure accountability and end impunity for such violations. We appreciate his clear condemnation of the use of chemical weapons, his support for the establishment of an attribution mechanism to identify perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons, his engagement to promote the complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula, and his appeal to preserve the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action in order to ensure the peaceful nature of Iran’s nuclear programme.

Mr. Chairman,

The EU is appalled by the re-emergence of chemical weapons in recent years in the Middle East, Asia and now Europe. We are seriously concerned about any opposition to strengthening the capacity of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to address this issue. The EU condemns, in the strongest possible terms, the fact that the Syrian Armed Forces have used chemical weapons on four occasions, including sarin in the city of Khan Shaykhun on 4 April 2017 in an attack which killed dozens, as confirmed by the report of the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism. The EU also condemns, in the strongest possible terms, the use of sulfur mustard by Daes’h on two occasions, as confirmed by the reports of the JIM. We support the work of the OPCW and its Fact-Finding Mission, the Commission of Inquiry and the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism and are deeply concerned by continuing reports pointing to the use of chemical weapons in different locations in Syria in recent months,
including a devastating chemical attack on Douma which killed dozens, and which is under ongoing investigation.

We urge the Syrian Arab Republic to honour its obligations as a State Party to the Chemical Weapons Convention, fully cooperate with the OPCW, give full disclosure of its chemical weapons programmes, including declaring the chemical weapons it still possesses, and destroy its chemical weapons programme in a complete and irreversible manner.

The EU condemns, in the strongest terms, any use of these abhorrent weapons of mass destruction, including the use of any toxic chemicals as weapons. There can be no impunity and those responsible must be held accountable. In this context, the EU and its Member States support the recent decision by the Conference of States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) to enhance the OPCW Technical Secretariat’s capacity to identify the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons in Syria as well as the development of universal attribution arrangements. We reiterate our continued commitment to the implementation of this decision, as stated by EU Heads of State and Government. The EU has imposed restrictive measures on Syrian high-level officials and scientists for their role in the development and use of chemical weapons and will consider further measures, as appropriate. On 15 October 2018, EU Foreign Ministers will adopt a new regime of restrictive measures to address the use and proliferation of chemical weapons and we look forward to early progress on the listing of relevant individuals and entities.

The EU reiterates its condemnation, in the strongest possible terms, of the March 2018 attack in Salisbury. The European Council last March agreed with the assessment of the UK government that it is highly likely that the Russian Federation is responsible and that there is no other plausible alternative explanation. The EU has repeatedly expressed its support for actions taken by the UK in investigating the attack, involving the use of a military-grade nerve agent of a type developed by Russia. The information provided by the UK investigation concluded that the two suspects are officers from the Russian military intelligence service. We reaffirm our solidarity with the UK and commend the UK for its transparency and the progress in the investigation which we hope will soon lead to the prosecution of the perpetrators of these abhorrent acts.

We reaffirm our strong support for the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC). The EU welcomes the successful launch of the current BTWC intersessional process which is crucial in promoting and furthering implementation of the Convention. We wish to highlight our serious concern over the critical financial situation which is putting the BTWC’s future operation, the next Meeting of States Parties (MSP) and the very existence of the Implementation Support Unit (ISU) at risk. We urge States Parties and the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) to find a solution to this without delay.

The EU reiterates its concerns raised by the increased ability and willingness of State and non-State actors to pursue their objectives by undertaking malicious cyber activities that threaten international peace and security. In that light, the EU is gravely concerned with the attempt by the Russian military intelligence service (GRU) to undermine the integrity of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), as reported by the Netherlands, which hosts
the organisation. This aggressive cyber operation demonstrates grave contempt for the solemn purpose of the OPCW, which works to eradicate chemical weapons worldwide, notably under a UN mandate. EU Member States deplore such hostile cyber operations which undermine international law and international institutions.

EU Member States reaffirm their commitment to uphold the rules-based international system, and defend international institutions from those that seek to do them harm, by improving and strengthening stability in cyber space, including through the UN. We call on the UN Secretary-General to continue to study and implement the 2015 measures to promote stability and security in cyber space, and we look forward to the convening of a new Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) in 2019. The EU will prioritize a consensus resolution that reaffirms the view articulated in previous GGE reports, including the application of international law in cyber space, norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviour of States, confidence-building measures and capacity building, as a basis for future work. The resolution should also underline the importance of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in cyber space.

Mr. Chairman,

The ongoing diplomatic efforts with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) are a positive development that contributes to easing tensions on the Korean Peninsula. The EU urges the DPRK to engage seriously in the follow-on negotiations and embark on a credible path towards a complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearisation and the abandonment of all other WMD programmes. Until the DPRK does take concrete steps towards denuclearisation, we will continue to strictly enforce existing sanctions and call upon all States to do the same. We call upon the DPRK to maintain its declared suspension of testing of nuclear weapons and of ballistic missile launches and to comply with its obligations under multiple UN Security Council Resolutions, including returning to compliance with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and to IAEA Safeguards at an early date and to signing and ratifying the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) without delay.

We recall that the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), negotiated with regard to the Iranian nuclear programme, is a key element of the global non-proliferation architecture and a significant achievement of multilateral diplomacy, endorsed by the UN Security Council through Resolution 2231. In this context, the EU deeply regrets the withdrawal of the US from the JCPOA. As confirmed by twelve consecutive reports issued by the IAEA and most recently in its recent report of 30 August 2018, Iran has continued to implement its nuclear related commitments, and it must continue to do so. Alongside implementation by Iran of its nuclear related commitments, the lifting of sanctions constitutes an essential part of the JCPOA. Work is underway towards a legal entity to allow European companies to continue their legitimate trade with Iran in line with UN Security Council resolution 2231. We call upon Iran to play a constructive role in the region and not to undertake any activity related to ballistic missiles designed to be capable of delivering nuclear weapons, including launches using such ballistic missile technology, which are inconsistent with UN Security Council Resolution 2231, and cease arms transfers, which are prohibited under UN Security Council Resolutions, including 2216.
The EU has repeatedly stressed the need to implement all obligations and commitments under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), including the need for concrete progress towards the full implementation of Article VI, with the ultimate goal of total elimination of nuclear weapons. We recall that all States Parties have committed to pursuing policies that are fully compatible with the Treaty and the objective of achieving a world without nuclear weapons. In a holistic approach, we continue to actively promote universalisation and prompt entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban-Treaty (CTBT), advocate immediate negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament on a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT), support international efforts on nuclear disarmament verification, and the establishment of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East.

We continue to encourage the United States and the Russian Federation to extend the New START Treaty, seek further reductions to their arsenals, including strategic and non-strategic, deployed and non-deployed nuclear weapons, and pursue further discussions on confidence building, transparency, verification activities and reporting, taking into account the special responsibility of the States that possess the largest nuclear arsenals. Given the severe security environment, we encourage all States concerned to take appropriate risk reduction measures, which are important to also ensure the safety and security of their nuclear arsenals. We call on Russia to address the serious concerns regarding its compliance with the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty in a substantial and transparent manner. We ask the United States and the Russian Federation to remain engaged in active dialogue to preserve the INF Treaty and ensure its full and verifiable implementation, which is crucial for Europe’s and other regions’ security.

Mr. Chairman,

We emphasise that all existing as well as future weapons systems must be developed, deployed and used in conformity with international law, including Human Rights Law and International Humanitarian Law. We firmly believe that humans must continue to be able to make the decisions with regard to the use of lethal force, maintain control over lethal weapons systems they use, and remain accountable for decisions over life and death.

Illicit, poorly regulated or unregulated flows of arms and ammunition threaten peace and security, fuel terrorism and organised crime, and have a wide range of humanitarian and socioeconomic consequences. In this context, the EU welcomes the outcome of the Third Review Conference of the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) and the International Tracing Instrument to step up national, regional and international action against diversion, illicit trade and unauthorised use. We call upon all UN Member States, in particular major arms exporters, importers and transit countries, to join the Arms Trade Treaty, to which all EU Member States are parties.

The EU will continue to take a strong stand to promote the respect for International Humanitarian Law and the protection of civilians in all conflict situations. The UN Secretary-General has rightly drawn our attention to the continued attacks, both deliberate and indiscriminate, against civilian populations, hospitals and schools. Every day, news reports remind us that civilians disproportionately suffer from the consequences of conflict and
instability. Persons in vulnerable situations are particularly affected. This was a worrying trend throughout 2017, which unfortunately has continued in 2018. Civilian populations continue to bear the brunt of armed conflicts across the globe, whether it is as victims of deliberate or indiscriminate attacks, as those suffering from the humanitarian, reverberating and long-term effects of urban warfare, or as those forcibly displaced from their homes. We call on all parties to armed conflict to fully comply with International Humanitarian Law.

We welcome the efforts of the UN Secretary-General to reinforce synergies across the UN system with the aim to maximise progress towards peace, security, sustainable development and human rights. Our work can make an important contribution to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, especially, but not limited to Goal 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) and Goal 5 (gender equality), to which the EU and its Member States are fully committed. We encourage all UN Member States to mainstream gender issues in their policies and programmes and to collect gender-disaggregated data for relevant indicators to be able to measure progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Enhanced ownership by affected States and improved coordination between donors and other stakeholders is essential to ensure that our efforts, whether in the area of mine action, small arms control, or other areas of capacity development, are as effective and sustainable as possible.

The EU emphasizes that gender equality and the empowerment of women is an important horizontal priority for the EU, and that the Women, Peace and Security Agenda continues to feature prominently in EU external action. Women must be fully involved, through active and equal participation, including in leadership in non-proliferation and disarmament efforts. The EU and its Member States also support further engagement of civil society, academia, and other stakeholders in addressing and discussing challenges related to disarmament and non-proliferation.

Mr. Chairman,

The European Union is committed to effective multilateralism and the rules-based international system, with the United Nations at its core. We will continue to do our utmost to promote a stable international and regional environment and address the root causes of instability stemming from political conflicts, destabilizing accumulation of weapons, poverty, environmental degradation and human rights violations. The EU provides significant political and financial support to multilateral institutions to uphold and strengthen key international treaties, conventions, agreements and other instruments, promote universal adherence thereto and help other countries to implement their obligations.

The EU is gravely concerned about ongoing financial difficulties afflicting major disarmament and non-proliferation conventions. States Parties' repeated failure to pay their contributions in full and on time may ultimately stymie processes and activities vital to the durability and relevance of these conventions. We therefore call on all actors to demonstrate strong support for multilateral cooperation in these critical times.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.