Statement of the Netherlands
delivered by
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at the

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Thematic Debate on Other Weapons of Mass Destruction

New York, 23 October 2019
Thank you Chairperson,

In addition to the statement delivered by the EU, the Netherlands would like to make the following remarks in its national capacity. We also joined the joint statement by the participating States of the International Partnership against the impunity for the use of chemical weapons, to be delivered by France.

Multilateral institutions play a major role in promoting international security. In recent years, it seems increasingly difficult for the international community to find common ground in areas of critical concern. Yet, we now seek to turn the page. Effective multilateral action is more needed than ever to effectively address WMD issues, and to work towards a safer world.

Chairperson,

It has been a challenging year for the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), situated in the Hague. The recent and repeated use of chemical weapons shows that the prohibition and global non-use norm of these weapons is under threat. In the meanwhile, we are witnessing further politicization of the OPCW along with attempts to question the integrity of the Organisation, undermining its work and functioning. Yet, the Netherlands has full confidence in the impartiality and professionalism of the Director General and the Technical Secretariat. The OPCW plays a central role in eradicating chemical weapons worldwide and preventing their re-emergence. This year, we hope to be able to agree on proposals that will further strengthen the Organisation and allow us to act more effectively.

The Netherlands is concerned about the lack of progress with regard to the verification and dismantling of the chemical weapons programme in Syria. This is even more urgent in the face of numerous reported attacks with chemical weapons. Even six years after Syria's accession to the CWC, Syria has not given full disclosure. The recent report by the Declaration Assessment Team, which mentions the discovery of chemical substances not previously reported by Syria, is illustrative and worrying in this regard. We urge the Syrian Arab Republic to fully cooperate with the OPCW Technical Secretariat.

The Netherlands welcomes and fully supports the decision of the Fourth Special Conference of State Parties in June last year to expand the mandate of the Director General of the OPCW to not only investigate if chemical weapons were used in Syria, but also to identify perpetrators. The Information and Investigation Team and its leader Ambassador Santiago Oñate have our full confidence and we are looking forward to the first report of the IIT. Attribution would not only mark an important step towards accountability and justice, but will also deter both State and non-State actors from further use of chemical weapons.

Earlier this year, the Executive Council of the OPCW endorsed - by consensus - a proposal by the United States, Canada and the Netherlands to include on the CWC Schedule 1 list the type of chemical warfare agent used in Salisbury last year. The
Scientific Advisory Board of the OPCW clearly outlined its extreme risks. Moreover, it has no known use for purposes not prohibited by the CWC. We are therefore convinced that urgent action needs to be taken to list these chemicals. We hope and trust that member states will adopt the Joint Proposal of the US, Canada and the Netherlands at the upcoming Conference of States Parties (CSP). In this spirit we welcome the announcement of the Russian Federation that it has adapted its own proposal to add chemicals to Schedule 1 and that it is ready to join consensus on both proposals at the CSP.

Chairperson,

In August this year, Member States of the Biological and Toxine Weapons Convention (BTWC) discussed ways to further strengthen the Convention, including through Confidence Building Measures and Peer Review. We welcome the discussions that took place and hope that the issues that are broadly supported will allow us to take further action in this field. The Netherlands is committed to advancing biosecurity worldwide, including through the international role of the Dutch Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM) and in the framework of the Global Partnership against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction.

The Netherlands also wishes to stress the importance of taking into account rapid advancements in biotechnology. We are pleased to witness increasing international awareness of the need for the BTWC to react to these developments in order to remain effective and relevant. We strongly support recommendations with regards to structured risk analysis of new technological developments. In this context, the Netherlands, together with Sweden, co-sponsored a working paper by Germany that describes how a scientific and technological experts advisory forum could be set up within the framework of the BTWC. The proposed process could build on the Ministerial Conference '2019. Capturing Technology. Rethinking Arms Control' that took place in Berlin last March, in which our Minister of Foreign Affairs H.E. Stef Blok has played an active role together with his Swedish and German counterparts.

The Netherlands is seriously concerned about the grave financial situation of the Convention, which puts at risk the proper holding of future meetings and the continued functioning of the Implementation Support Unit (ISU). We urge those States Parties in arrears of their assessed contributions to pay the outstanding amounts in full and as soon as possible. We call upon all States Parties to expedite their collective efforts to develop measures for ensuring the financial sustainability and institutional viability of the BTWC.

Chairperson,

The CWC and the BTWC are two indispensable instruments in our collective pursuit of a safer world. We call on the states that remain outside these Conventions to accede without delay.

Thank you.