



**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR THOMAS SCHIEB, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF
GERMANY TO THE OPCW, AT THE 108th SESSION OF
THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

(The Hague, 4 – 7 March 2025)

Mr. Chairperson, Director-General,
distinguished Ambassadors and delegates,

Germany aligns itself with the statement delivered by the Permanent Representative of Poland on behalf of the EU.

We wish the Chairperson of the Executive Council, H.E. Ambassador Andres Teran Parral, all the best for chairing the March Council session.

Mr. Chairperson,

One doesn't have to be a prophet to predict that 2025 will be a particularly challenging year for the OPCW.

With the Assad regime gone, there is now a unique chance for Syria, with the help and under the control of the OPCW, to rid the country of the remaining chemical weapons and all related material for good. The Council should stand ready to do all it can to support this endeavor.

This historic opportunity should not to be missed!

We commend the DG for initiating a special session of the Council only days after the demise of the Assad regime in early December and for his visit to Damascus on 8 February that prepared the ground for starting the process of securing, verifying and subsequently destroying the remainders of Assad's CW program.

Let me also stress that when FM Annalena Baerbock and her French counterpart Jean-Noël Barrot travelled to Damascus in early January, they raised the issue of chemical weapons and got reassured by the Syrian leadership which confirmed its willingness to assume its obligations under the CWC and to cooperate with the OPCW. In this context, we very much welcome that Syria has now appointed a point of contact which allows the OPCW to establish a mission in Syria and to deploy the first team of experts shortly.

The work ahead will be extremely demanding. The situation in Syria will remain very volatile in the foreseeable future. There is no time to lose. As long as the many sites in question have not been secured, there is a significant risk that the remaining chemical weapons, precursors and other toxic chemicals could fall into the wrong hands.

Germany stands ready to support the OPCW in this important endeavor, as we did in earlier cases when Germany contributed to the destruction of Syrian chemical weapons in 2014-15 and to the final destruction of Libya's chemical weapons 2016-17. We call on all States Parties to join these collective efforts and to contribute to supporting the OPCW in any way possible.

Mr. Chairperson,

It is to be commended that the TS and the Policy Making Organs, in a period lasting more than 10 years, did not let the former Syrian regime off the hook; that they did not get distracted by

the Assad regime's siren songs, trying to create the impression that it was cooperating with the TS while it was only pretending to. Thanks to the perseverance and tenacity of the TS and to the activities of the FFM, DAT and IIT respectively, the OPCW is now benefiting from a plethora of knowledge and expertise regarding the remainders of the former regime's CW program.

The new situation also provides opportunities for making significant advances in the context of accountability. Hopefully, it will be possible to collect more evidential information, in addition to the significant amounts of such information already collected over the years, including by the IIT. This would help the efforts to seize, prosecute and convict the perpetrators of CW use and to finally make them accountable for their heinous crimes against the Syrian people.

Mr. Chairperson,

For more than a year, this Council has been formally seized with the issue of serious allegations that Russia is blatantly violating the Convention by using Riot Control Agents as well as possibly other toxic chemicals, like the scheduled choking agent chloropicrin, in its war of aggression against Ukraine.

In two TAV reports so far – one published last November, the second only about two weeks ago - the TS has confirmed that CS gas has been used as a method of warfare in Ukraine.

We share the grave concern expressed by the DG over the latest findings in the OPCW's press statement dated 14 February.

Let me emphasize: The fact that the TS has again confirmed the violation of the CWC should be of grave concern to *all* members of this Council whose core mandate it is to promote the implementation of and compliance with the Convention, thereby upholding the chemical weapons taboo!

Consequently, the members of this Council should share the view that, given the TS' confirmation that the CWC has been violated, it is now of critical importance to identify those responsible.

While neither of the two TAV reports contain any attribution of responsibility for these breaches of the Convention, in our assessment the circumstances clearly point to the direction of Russia. Given Russia's responses in previous EC sessions to the ever-mounting information on its violations of the Convention in Ukraine, we should not expect Russia, at this EC session, to help clarify these serious allegations.

That is why we consider it urgent that the Technical Secretariat, based on its findings so far, focusses on the identification of the perpetrators of these clear violations of the CWC in its future activities.

Mr. Chairperson,

As a technical and highly specialized organization, the OPCW relies on a limited pool of qualified experts to carry out the organisation's core tasks. It is safe to say that these tasks will grow in the future, especially in view of the foreseeable workload regarding Syria. This is why Germany very much supports the proposed decision that will allow the organization to rehire the most talented and experienced experts in exceptional cases.

Mr. Chairperson,

Among the many other issues on the Council's agenda this year, the steering of the process leading to the appointment of the successor to DG Arias will be of particular importance. The DG's successor will have big shoes to fill for sure. Germany is confident that the competition among the future candidates will be smooth, fair and transparent.

Given its potentially enormous impact on the work of the OPCW, the topic of emerging technologies needs to be high on the organization's agenda. We welcome that the EC will

regularly discuss this important topic, and we thank the TS for preparing an excellent, very substantial note in light of the exchanges so far, including outlining next steps.

Mr. Chairperson,

Before concluding, and if you allow me a personal remark, I would just like to say that I am very much looking forward to the visit of the Council to the Northern German town of Munster next week. In Munster, in currently the world-biggest operation of that kind, thousands of OCW, dumped and buried there at the end of WWII, are being excavated and destroyed in cooperation with the TS and with the help of the specialized company GEKA respectively. The Council will have the opportunity to familiarize itself with this complex project and the challenges involved.

Concluding, I would like to commend the Director-General, H.E. Ambassador Fernando Arias, and the Technical Secretariat for ensuring the effective implementation of the mandate of the OPCW. The Director-General and the Technical Secretariat can continue counting on Germany's unwavering support and active role in promoting the work of the OPCW.
