

Statement to the 111th Session of the Executive Council of the OPCW

11.3.2026 - | Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs

Statement by His Excellency Chris Rampling, Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland at the 111th Executive Council of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

Chair, Director-General, Deputy-Director General, Excellencies,

I would like to begin by thanking the Director-General for your comprehensive update and to your colleagues for the continuing work of the OPCW to confront growing chemical weapon related risks and ensuring a world free from chemical weapons. My thanks also to the current Executive Council chair, Ambassador Thomas Scheib, for leading this Council so adeptly during his tenure.

Chair,

Russia's appetite to develop and deploy highly toxic chemicals – abroad, against civilians and against its own people – remains undiminished. It demonstrates total disregard for the Chemical Weapons Convention, undermines international norms, and poses a serious threat to international security. Russia is irresponsibly and dangerously disregarding the non-proliferation and disarmament rules that keep us safe.

Last month, the United Kingdom, together with France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden, determined that Alexei Navalny was poisoned with a lethal toxin, epibatidine, while incarcerated in a Russian prison in February 2024. As my Foreign Secretary noted, 'Only the Russian Federation had the means, motivation and opportunity to deploy this lethal toxin'. I'm grateful to the DG for confirming that epibatidine falls under the purview of the CWC. Russia must respond comprehensively to the questions submitted to them under Article IX, paragraph 4.

In December 2025, an independent, impartial inquiry concluded that Russia was responsible for the death of the UK national, Dawn Sturgess, in Amesbury in 2018. She had been exposed to a Novichok nerve agent after handling a perfume bottle that Russian intelligence agents had recklessly discarded in a civilian area, just a local street, after using it to poison the Skripals in Salisbury. An issue this council has followed closely.

And of course, Russia also continues to use toxic chemicals across the frontline in Ukraine. The UK welcomes the Technical Secretariat's commitment to provide technical expertise to support Ukrainian led efforts to identify and attribute perpetrators. We support the effort without reservation – the Executive Council must do so too. Russia's habitual use of prohibited chemicals is a challenge for us all.

Chair,

Russia's disregard for the Chemical Weapons Convention sets a deeply troubling precedent and example at a time when reports of chemical weapon use elsewhere are increasing and our common goal is threatened. We remain particularly concerned about reports of chemical weapon use in Sudan. The Sudanese government must release the findings of its investigation without further delay.

Chair,

The OPCW continues to play a central and crucial role in reinforcing international security. We welcome recent updates from Syria and the Technical Secretariat outlining tangible steps toward identifying and eliminating the legacy Assad chemical weapons programme. The DG's report today further reminds us of the serious issues. We also welcome the latest IIT report attributing responsibility for the 2016 Kafr Zita attack to the Assad regime. Additional international financial and technical support remains essential to maintain this progress. Since December 2024, the UK has contributed over 3 million pounds to the OPCW Syria Missions Trust Fund, and we have also secured a multi-million pound package for Syrian led destruction activities. We will continue to support the OPCW's work in Syria and that of the Syrian authorities until the job is done. This is more important than ever, in the context of the Iranian regime's reckless attacks in the Middle East region

The long-term viability of this Organisation depends on its ability to adapt proactively to fast-moving global challenges. The UK welcomes the Scientific Advisory Board's recommendations on emerging technologies and the Industry Cluster's work to reinforce the Verification Regime - central to reducing chemical weapon risks. To ensure the Organisation is properly resourced to fulfil its mandates, the UK continues to support restoring 241 industry inspections and increased regular budgetary funding for the Syria missions.

Chair,

As we marked International Women's Day this past weekend, I want to reaffirm the UK's support for advancing gender equality across the OPCW. We encourage continued progress in applying Women, Peace and Security principles and ensuring women's full and meaningful participation at all levels.

Chair,

Through collective resolve, effective implementation, and a modern, adaptable OPCW, we are confident that we can ensure that the global norm against chemical weapons remains strong for generations to come. I thank the Technical Secretariat and Executive Council partners for all they are doing to serve this aim.

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