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EUROPEAN UNION STATEMENT TO THE TENTH CONFERENCE OF STATES PARTIES, DELIVERED BY DR KIM HOWELLS, MINISTER OF STATE, FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE, UNITED KINGDOM

Mr Chairman,

It gives me great pleasure to make this statement on behalf of the European Union.

I'm delighted to see the audience for our statements grow each year, as the OPCW rapidly expands. I extend a warm welcome to those States Parties who have acceded to the Convention since the last Conference - Antigua and Barbuda, Bhutan, Cambodia, Grenada, Honduras, Niue and Vanuatu. I also look forward to others joining us in the future and, in particular, welcome the intention of Iraq to become a State Party.

The EU Strategy Against the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction recognises the crucial role of the Chemical Weapons Convention and of this Organisation in creating a world free of chemical weapons. The EU's commitment to the Convention and the OPCW is also reflected in our Joint Action in Support of the Organisation, which supports OPCW projects on universality, national implementation and international co-operation. The EU is now considering a further Joint Action in Support of the OPCW, to be implemented next year.

Chemical weapons disarmament is becoming increasingly urgent as we approach the 2007 deadline for the destruction of these weapons. The EU attaches great importance to the irreversible destruction of chemical weapons within the deadlines laid down in the Convention and decisions of

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this Conference. The EU recalls that the Verification Annex of the Convention requires that detailed requests to extend the 2007 deadline, and therefore any outstanding intermediate deadlines, must be submitted to the Executive Council no later than 29 April 2006. The EU underlines that there are no provisions in the Convention for a State Party to complete destruction of its chemical weapons after 2012. The EU urges all possessor states to redouble their efforts to destroy their stockpiles within the agreed timelines.

The EU welcomes the revised Russian destruction programme, including Russia's decision, earlier this year, to increase funding of the programme, so that it can be completed on time. The EU underlines the urgency of turning these commitments into action. The EU and its Member States will continue to provide assistance in order to help the Russian Federation fulfil its obligations under the Convention.

Mr Chairman,

All States Parties commit themselves to full implementation of the Convention and its Universality on joining the OPCW. The Action Plan on the National Implementation of the Convention underlines the obligation of all States Parties to complete their implementation measures and the common commitment to help those States Parties which require support. The recent report of the Technical Secretariat shows that progress is being made towards achieving the goals of the Action Plan and that more States Parties are working on draft legislation to implement the Convention. However, there is still much more to do. At this Conference, we must consider and decide on appropriate measures to ensure compliance by all States Parties with Article VII.

The EU has helped promote universal adherence to the Convention by urging all States Not Party to accede or ratify without delay. It is encouraging that there are now 175 States Parties. The EU supports the proposal to continue the work under the Action Plan on Universality, including by setting a target for the number of new States Parties.

Universal adherence to and full implementation of the Convention are critical to the fight against chemical terrorism. The EU supports the work to step up the OPCW's contribution to the fight against terrorism, for example by promoting awareness about the OPCW's role among other international organisations.

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The European Union also supports the development of the OPCW's capacity to help States Parties in the event of an attack, or threat of attack, with chemical weapons. The EU welcomes the proposed format for States Parties' offers of assistance. The EU congratulates the OPCW and Ukraine on their successful exercise, Joint Assistance 2005, which demonstrated the Organisation's ability to respond to a request for help after terrorist attacks involving toxic chemicals.

Inspections of the chemical industry build confidence about the non-proliferation of chemical weapons to state and non-state actors. The European Union believes it is essential for the OPCW to improve its mechanism for selecting "Other Chemical Production Facilities" for inspection, by taking account of all the factors specified in the Convention. The EU is also keen to resolve the issues of the "captive use" of Schedule 1 chemicals and low concentrations of Schedule 2A and 2A asterisk chemicals as soon as possible.

The European Union, in its Strategy against the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction and Action Plan on Challenge Inspections, underlined the importance of the challenge inspection mechanism as a means of clarifying concerns about possible non-compliance with the Convention. The EU welcomes the Secretariat's work to maintain its readiness to conduct a challenge inspection if requested, in particular its involvement in regular exercises, both internally and with States Parties.

Mr Chairman,

EU Member States contribute more than a third of the OPCW's regular budget. We also contribute heavily through voluntary contributions and financial assistance under the EU Joint Action. EU Member States have approved the draft budget for 2006 which will, for the first time, mean zero nominal growth.

Even with an approved budget, this Organisation will not be able fully to implement its programme of work unless assessed contributions are paid in a timely manner by all States Parties and the cost of verification under Articles IV and V of the Convention is reimbursed within the agreed timelines. The EU is concerned that a significant number of States Parties are still not paying their assessed contributions on time, and that reimbursement by

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possessor states of the cost of verification is often delayed. The EU appeals to all the States Parties concerned to improve their rate of payment, to ensure the uninterrupted operations of all approved programmes. In accordance with OPCW rules, States Parties risk losing their voting rights if they do not pay their contributions for two years. Other risks to the 2006 programme and budget, for example from fluctuations in the Euro/Dollar exchange rate, will have to be monitored closely by the States Parties, the Secretariat and the Organisation's oversight bodies.

The European Union wishes to express its support for the nomination of the German Supreme Audit Institution as External Auditor of the OPCW. We believe that this organisation fully meets the OPCW's requirements and would bring valuable experience to the audit of the OPCW, including from the audit of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Finally, Mr Chairman, it remains for me to thank you, and to say a few words about our Director-General. The leadership of Ambassador Rogelio Pfirter of Argentina has contributed substantially to the continued development and success of our Organisation over the last three years. The EU was therefore very happy to support his reappointment at the meeting of the Council in September, and will do so again with pleasure this week.

Thank you very much.

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