



CZECH REPUBLIC

Permanent Mission of the Czech Republic to the United Nations

77th Session of the General Assembly

First Committee, Thematic Debate – Other Weapons of Mass Destruction

Statement by

Mr. Jaroslav Štěpánek

Head of Disarmament, Non-Proliferation and
Export Control Regimes Unit, MFA

New York, 19 October 2022

Check against Delivery

One Dag Hammarskjöld Plaza, 48th floor
885 Second Avenue, New York, NY 10017
tel.: +1 (646) 981 4001, fax: +1 (646) 981 4099
www.mzv.cz/un.newyork

Chair,

The Czech Republic fully aligns itself with the statement delivered by the European Union. We once again condemn in the strongest possible terms the Russian aggression against Ukraine, which represents an unjustifiable breach of the UN Charter and international law.

The Russian invasion in Ukraine has considerably aggravated the risks related to weapons of mass destruction. This is deeply concerning.

With regard to chemical weapons, we strongly condemn the disinformation attempts by Russia about the alleged plots by Ukraine to misuse toxic chemicals in the conflict. These insinuations are lacking any factual basis. We call on Russia to stop creating such disinformation fog, which is part of its effort to divert the attention of the international community from its inadmissible actions in Ukraine. Let us recall that it was, in fact, the leaders of the pro-Russian separatist forces that have used unacceptable rhetoric threatening with chemical weapons use during the Azovstal siege.

This is not the first time when we see Russia trying to divert attention from chemical weapons use by its own agents or by its allies, notably Syria.

By now, a total of eleven cases of proven use of chemical weapons in Syria have been established through international investigation, the first six by the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) and four – so far - by the OPCW's Investigation and Identification Team (IIT). While ISIL has been identified as perpetrator in two cases, the remaining eight have been attributed to the Syrian armed forces.

It comes as no surprise that Syria, vehemently supported by Russia and its allies, tries to fight back the factually and scientifically solid conclusions of those investigations. Their deliberate obfuscation must not divert us from considering the conclusions reached by the JIM and now by the IIT in all their seriousness. The Policy Making Organs of the OPCW have already acted within the Convention's remit in response to those most serious breaches of the Convention, namely by depriving Syria of its voting rights. But the OPCW is not an accountability mechanism. It is the United Nations that should now act, based on the OPCW reports, to ensure justice for the victims and to end impunity for chemical weapons use.

Lastly, we have to recall that Russia has used a military grade nerve agent from the novichok family against Sergei and Julia Skripal in 2018, and against Alexei Navalny in 2020. All these poisonings carried out by Russian agents constitute a flagrant breach of the Convention. We urge Russia to acknowledge its acts and ensure that they are not repeated.

Regarding biological weapons, we find ourselves in a critical period of a run-up to the Ninth BTWC Review Conference. The Czech Republic is a long-standing supporter of the BTWC. We expect the Review Conference to adopt decisions that will allow for strengthening of the Convention. This is why we support the Establishment of an

Open-ended Working Group with a two year mandate, focused on exploring practical possibilities for such strengthening.

Science and technology developments in the area of biology are remarkable and the Convention needs to keep up with them, in order to remain relevant. Establishing a science advisory mechanism under the BTWC therefore belongs to our priorities. Policy discourse must be based on objective and reliable scientific advice.

We strongly encourage all State Parties to approach the Review Conference in a forward-looking spirit and readiness to look for consensual solutions. We should not allow the Conference to be hi-jacked by fabricated accusations that Russia has been putting forward over the past year, in relation to capacity building programmes run by the United States in Ukraine. We have carefully studied all the information provided by both the US and Ukraine, as well as the numerous submissions by Russia, and found no credible evidence of illicit activities. On the contrary, the programmes on biosecurity are a good practice example of international cooperation in this field.

In conclusion, Chair,

The Czech Republic wishes to clearly condemn any use or threat of use of chemical or biological weapons. It is disturbing to see that those weapons that should have by now become weapons of the past continue to be used. The international community must stand strong in defending the norms against both chemical and biological weapons. This requires increased vigilance and determination to register and investigate such cases, but also taking firm international action in case of breaches of the norms.

Thank you.