

**STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE NORDIC COUNTRIES**

at the

**First Committee, Thematic Debate on Other Weapons of Mass Destruction**

**United Nations**

**New York**

**22 October 2018**

Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the honour to take the floor on behalf of the Nordic countries Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and my own country, Sweden.

The risk of biological and chemical weapons continue to threaten international peace and security. Chemical weapons are being used in flagrant violation of the unequivocal global ban with the risk of undermining existing norms against the use of WMD. The potential for misuse of scientific innovations, for instance in synthetic biology, constitutes an ever-evolving security challenge. The Nordic countries were pleased to see ambitious goals with regard to chemical and biological non-proliferation included in the Secretary-General's "Agenda for Disarmament".

The Nordic countries welcome the completion of chemical weapons destruction operations in Iraq and Libya. At the same time, we are highly concerned with the continued possession of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime. This is evidenced by repeated horrifying cases of use of sarin and chlorine gas over the past years, as reported by the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism. All chemical weapons possessed by the Syrian Arab Republic should have been declared and destroyed. The Nordic countries contributed significantly to the international mission to ship out Syria's declared chemical weapons for destruction in 2014. Once again, we strongly urge the Syrian Arab Republic immediately to disclose all relevant information concerning its chemical weapons programme and to fulfil completely its declaration obligations. This is the only way that the OPCW can verify the veracity and completeness of the Syrian declarations and the irreversible destruction of all its chemical weapons and production facilities.

Recent events in Salisbury and Amesbury are unacceptable. The Nordic countries condemn the assassination attempt on 4 March this year, when a substance developed as a chemical warfare-agent was employed within the borders of the United Kingdom - a close friend and partner of the Nordic countries. We reaffirm our solidarity with the UK in the face of this grave challenge to our collective security. The Nordic countries have full confidence in the findings of the UK investigation, which stated that the Russian military intelligence service was behind the incident. We also deplore the hostile cyber operation by Russian military intelligence service in April which targeted the OPCW, thereby challenging the integrity and independence of the international organisation charged with promoting a world free of chemical weapons.

The Nordic countries unequivocally condemn all use of chemical weapons in contradiction of the global ban on such heinous weapons. Such use constitutes a violation of international law and may amount to a war crime or a crime against

humanity. We reiterate our strongly held view that the perpetrators of such inhumane and barbaric attacks must be held accountable. The Nordic countries deeply regretted that the mandate of the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism could not be renewed by the UN Security Council in November 2017. We consequently supported the decision of the Conference of States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention to task the OPCW with identifying the perpetrators of chemical weapons use in Syria and moving forward on the establishment of a global attribution mechanism. The Nordic countries have also joined the French-led International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons.

Against this background it is essential that we stand united and make best use of the up-coming Conference of States Parties and the Fourth Review Conference of the Chemical Weapons Convention to tackle the challenges confronting the global ban on chemical weapons.

Chairperson,

The Nordic countries welcome the agreement, at the latest Meeting of States Parties to the Biological Weapons Convention, on a strengthened intersessional work programme. The first set of expert meetings in the new format in August this year fulfilled the promise of a more focused and less academic thematic exchange on key issues facing the Convention. While this is encouraging, more needs to be done. The Nordic Countries call on all States Parties not to let the best be the enemy of the good, but to move forward incrementally on those issues where consensus seems to be within reach.

Given the dire financial situation facing the Biological Weapons Convention, we seize this opportunity to call on States Parties in arrears of payment of their annual assessed contributions to provide all their outstanding funding without delay.

Meanwhile, the Nordic countries continue their engagement to reduce biological weapons threats within the framework of the Secretary-General's Investigatory Mechanism, the Global Partnership against the Spread of Weapons of Mass Destruction, UN Security Council resolution 1540 and the Global Health Security Agenda. We welcome the launch of the Health-Security Interface programme of the World Health Organisation, which aims to improve preparedness for possible outbreaks of communicable disease due to deliberate events, as well as similar initiatives in the OIE and FAO.

In conclusion, we would like to turn to the issue of ballistic missiles. Ballistic missile programmes can be highly destabilizing – in particular in regions of tension. Restraint is of the essence. Moreover, lacking transparency and predictability regarding ballistic missile tests could result in miscalculations and have devastating effects. This is why the Nordic countries support the Hague Code-of-Conduct, and we call on all States that have yet to become members of the Code to do so as soon as possible.

Thank you Chairperson