



**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR SUSANNAH GORDON PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF  
NEW ZEALAND TO THE OPCW AT THE ONE HUNDREDTH AND SECOND SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

14 - 17 March 2023

Chair,

Aotearoa New Zealand remains steadfast in calling for accountability and justice, and cooperation from all member states in the OPCW. The OPCW is a disarmament organisation that works for peace and international security, with humanitarian and environmental responsibilities. Embedded in the Preamble of the Chemical Weapons Convention, we, as States Parties, determined to act with a view to achieving effective progress towards general and complete disarmament, including the prohibition and elimination of weapons of mass destruction. Aotearoa New Zealand holds firm to this commitment and calls on others to do the same.

In this regard, Aotearoa New Zealand condemns the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic in the attack in Douma, Syria, on 7 April 2018, documented in the recent report by the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT).

The Syrian Arab Republic's use of chemical weapons was confirmed following extensive, thorough and impartial OPCW investigations. There is no disputing the evidence.

This is not the first time the Syrian Arab Republic has been found to have used chemical weapons. All instances represent a serious violation of the Convention. As Aotearoa New Zealand has done previously, we call on the Syrian Arab Republic to come into compliance with the Convention, to declare and destroy the entirety of its chemical weapons programme, and to cooperate fully and in good faith with the Secretariat and other States Parties.

Like all weapons of mass destruction, chemical weapons are inhumane. They have horrifying effects on victims, and often disproportionate impact on women and children. The world collectively agreed to comprehensively ban them when we signed and ratified the Chemical Weapons Convention. Any state that breaches this obligation, as Syria has done, must be held to account.

We call on all States Parties to be united in the pursuit of accountability for Syria's use of chemical weapons and justice for the victims of this heinous act. We must be clear-eyed and steadfast in the face of disinformation that seeks to undermine the OPCW and shield Syria from the necessary consequences of its crimes. There can be no impunity.

One year on from Russia's illegal and unprovoked aggression against Ukraine our work continues. The blatant violation of the international rules based system, undermines rules and principles that are important to all of our countries. The way to ease the humanitarian suffering in Ukraine and regain economic stability is for Russia to end the war. As we have done at every level, consistently in this forum and others, Aotearoa New Zealand calls on

Russia to cease all military operations in Ukraine; to immediately and permanently withdraw; and to cease its efforts to undermine the prohibitions and norms against chemical weapons use.

We condemn unequivocally this invasion and continue to support Ukraine through a range of measures. We also call on all States Parties to redouble their commitment to the international rules-based order and to their commitments to disarmament. We are stronger together.

Chair, despite the harmful actions of a few, there is much to look forward to in our work together.

We welcome the productive discussions we have had as a membership as we prepare for the 5th Chemical Weapons Convention Review Conference in May. We look forward to this continuing under the able leadership of Ambassador Kuusing of Estonia. We stand ready to work cooperatively to strengthen and safeguard the Convention to ensure it delivers for us in the decades ahead.

Mā mua ka kite a muri, mā muri ka ora a mua.<sup>1</sup>

Thank you Chair

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<sup>1</sup> Translation and meaning: “Those who lead give us sight to those who follow, those who follow give life to those who lead”. This whakatauki also speaks to the importance of working together. It acknowledges and values the importance of both the leader and the followers for both are essential and co-dependent.