

**AUSTRALIA**  
**STATEMENT BY DR GREGORY FRENCH**  
**PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF AUSTRALIA TO THE OPCW**  
**AT THE 103RD SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

**Agenda Item 6 – General Debate**

Chair,

There are rare moments in the multilateral maelstrom when we may pause, take stock, and say: “it is done; it is good”. Now is such a moment, as we mark **the completion of destruction of all declared chemical weapons stockpiles**. We pay tribute to the decades-long hard work, tenacity and commitment of all those in the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and member states who have made this possible, and also commend the US for fulfilling its promise.

Chair,

Australia applauds the transparent, inclusive and consultative manner in which the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) **Fifth Review Conference (RevCon)** was conducted. We particularly appreciate the commitment of OPCW Director General Arias and the Technical Secretariat, Ambassador Henk Cor van der Kwast for his sturdy leadership as RevCon Chair, and the valuable preparatory work of the Open-Ended Working Group led by Ambassador Lauri Kuusing.

For our part, as RevCon Vice-Chair and WEOG Coordinator, Australia worked across regional groups to seek constructive approaches. We welcomed participation by our **neighbours**, Samoa, Fiji and Papua New Guinea, enabling the Pacific voice to resonate here. We look forward to deepening engagement in our region to promote CWC implementation, building on our partnership with Malaysia, and exploring opportunities to enhance capacity building through the ChemTec Centre. We invite Director General Arias to visit our region again.

Thanks to the good faith of most States Parties and sound leadership, much was achieved through the RevCon. But, there were a few who prioritised politics over our objective of ridding the world of chemical weapons.

We are especially disappointed that certain States could not agree to factual references in the report on **OPCW investigation and attribution work**. Thanks to the tireless and impartial work of the Technical Secretariat, the world knows the facts. In its third report, the OPCW IIT attributed the chlorine attack on 7 April 2018 in Douma to the Syrian Arab Air Force. Attribution is vital to deter future use. We support the Director General’s call to take action. Australia is concerned that **Syria** has downgraded its cooperation with the OPCW and call on Syria discharge its CWC obligations, as we all must. This month, Australia pledged \$100,000 AUD towards the Trust Fund for Syria Missions.

Australia condemns **Russia’s illegal and immoral aggression against Ukraine**, a gross violation of international law. We remain concerned about the risk of chemical weapons use by Russia in Ukraine. Australia stands with Ukraine and its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Australia remains deeply concerned by the poisoning of **Alexei Navalny** in 2020, using a Novichok nerve agent. We call on the Russian Federation to provide a full account of the incident and to cooperate with the Technical Secretariat.

Australia is proud, as permanent Chair of the **Australia Group**, to help participants fulfil their CWC obligations by controlling exports of sensitive and dual-use items. This helps all States Parties to apply appropriate and effective export controls, reduce chemical and biological weapons risks, and enable and sustain *peaceful legitimate* trade.

Australia supports **OPCW governance** through advancing work on tenure policy and promoting geographical and gender diversity of staff, and welcomes broader civil society engagement on CWC issues.

Chair, even as we herald the destruction of all declared stockpiles, we face new and grave challenges. Australia re-commits to supporting the OPCW's work towards a world free of chemical weapons, and looks forward to the Executive Council advancing this goal.

I ask that this statement be made an official document of the 103<sup>rd</sup> session of the Executive Council, and for it to be published on the OPCW external server and the public website.

Thank you, Chair.