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AUSTRALIA

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR NEIL MULES
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF AUSTRALIA TO THE OPCW AT THE
NINETEENTH SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES**

Madam Chair

I join others in congratulating you on your election as Chairperson of this Conference of the States Parties. You can rely on Australia's support.

At the outset, I want to congratulate the winners of the inaugural OPCW-The Hague Award – the staff at the Finish institute VERIFIN and Australia's Dr Bob Mathews. In Dr Mathews' case, Australia is very proud to see such recognition of his and Australia's deep and long-running contribution to the Chemical Weapons Convention.

I applaud the international community for its cooperation in ridding the Syrian Arab Republic of its chemical weapons. Governments from all corners of the world volunteered money, ships, destruction facilities and other support. I also congratulate the Director-General and the Technical Secretariat for their tireless efforts.

However, we are well past the 30 June target for the complete elimination of the Syrian Arab Republic's chemical weapons programme. Today, on 1 December, work to destroy its remaining chemical weapons production facilities has yet to begin. With the destruction plans now agreed, we urge the Syrian Government to cooperate with the OPCW and the international community to ensure these facilities can never again be used to produce chemical weapons.

Over a year on from the Syrian Arab Republic acceding to the Chemical Weapons Convention, it still has not provided satisfactory explanations for the many gaps and ambiguities in its initial declaration. While we have welcomed every amendment made to the Syrian Arab Republic's declaration, we cannot ignore that these have come as a result of pressure from others and not through voluntary declarations by the Syrian Arab Republic.

And now there is another grave challenge to the Chemical Weapons Convention in the Syrian Arab Republic. That is the reported use of chemical weapons – chlorine gas – in several Syrian villages this year.

The OPCW's Fact-Finding Mission has presented a strong, credible body of evidence that can only lead us to conclude that the Syrian Government bears responsibility for these attacks.



A State Party to the Convention appears to have used chemical weapons. The international response should match the seriousness of the allegations. We call on this Conference to send a strong message demanding appropriate action.

As we draw nearer to the Chemical Weapons Convention's post-destruction phase, we should continue to explore how we can make the Convention even stronger.

Australia is deeply concerned about a category of chemicals which is not currently addressed under the Convention. Many know this by the name 'incapacitating chemical agents' – but this is a dangerous misnomer which hides the fact that some of these chemicals are lethal at doses comparable to the nerve agent Vx.

On Thursday of this week, Australia will host a side event in the Ooms Room in the OPCW to discuss this issue. We have circulated a national paper on the subject, entitled 'Weaponisation of Central Nervous System-Acting Chemicals for Law Enforcement Purposes'. The paper calls for consultations, with a view to starting discussions on the weaponisation of such chemicals in law enforcement scenarios. I ask all States Parties to give serious consideration to Australia's paper and to participate in the side event on Thursday.

Last year, I confirmed unconditionally that Australia was not developing, producing, using or stockpiling any toxic chemicals, other than riot control agents, for law enforcement purposes. I reconfirm that declaration now, and I call on all States Parties to make their national positions known.

We can take pride in the fact that the Chemical Weapons Convention is very close to universal. But we should not be satisfied until we reach 100 per cent membership. Australia therefore welcomes the recent efforts made by Myanmar towards joining the Convention. In May, we were proud to host a delegation from Myanmar and provide encouragement, advice and assistance in joining the Convention. We welcome the attendance of Myanmar's Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, and we look forward to being able to welcome Myanmar as a State Party.

Comprehensive implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention's obligations is fundamental. Australia was proud to host a workshop in May this year, partnering with the Technical Secretariat and New Zealand to help National Authorities from Pacific Island countries and Timor-Leste strengthen their national implementation measures under Article VII.

We also need no reminding that full implementation of the Convention requires an effective and reliable capability within the Secretariat to conduct inspections and verification operations. Australia is concerned about the projected loss of many highly experienced OPCW inspectors from early 2016. We call on all States Parties to work together to find a lasting solution to this problem.

Australia recognises the important contribution made by the Scientific Advisory Board, across all aspects of the Convention. We particularly welcome the recent report provided by its Temporary Working Group on Education and Outreach.

Australia supports the recommendations of the report, including the proposal to establish an ongoing expert advisory group on education and outreach to promote the responsible use of science. And on the theme of outreach, Australia also welcomes Germany's proposal for a code of conduct for chemists, akin to the 'Hippocratic Oath'.

Another fundamental pillar of the Convention is, of course, Article IV and the destruction of all remaining chemical weapons.

We encourage all States Parties still possessing chemical weapons stockpiles to avoid any undue further delays in their destruction. Australia looks forward to an era when the spectre of chemical weapons is finally and irreversibly banished from our world.

I ask that this statement be considered an official document of the Conference.

Thank you Madam Chair.

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