



OPCW

Executive Council

Eighty-Seventh Session
13 – 15 March 2018

EC-87/NAT.32
13 March 2018
ENGLISH only

NEW ZEALAND

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR LYNDAL WALKER
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE OPCW
AT THE EIGHTY-SEVENTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Thank you, Chairperson. Thanks also to the Director-General for his update and the Technical Secretariat for their preparations for this meeting.

As we all know, this is a significant year for the OPCW as we prepare for the Fourth Review Conference in November. New Zealand will work constructively with the OPCW and all States Parties as we reflect on the OPCW's achievements and challenges, and consider what shape this Organisation should take in future years. We note, in particular, the excellent work of our Canadian and South African colleagues who have ably chaired the Open-Ended Working Group on Future Priorities throughout the course of the last two years. We also thank Ambassador Puja for his chairmanship of the Open-Ended Working Group on Preparations for the Fourth Review Conference and wish him all the best in this role. We know we are in capable hands.

I would like to record New Zealand's grave concern over the use of a chemical nerve agent in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, resulting in serious injury to those exposed. How this military grade nerve agent was transported from the Russian Federation and released abroad is the key issue here, and warrants urgent international investigation. As New Zealand has stated on many occasions, we are deeply disturbed at any use of chemical substances banned by the Chemical Weapons Convention. The use of chemical weapons as a tool for murder or assassination is highly repugnant and this incident is an affront to the global rules and norms that we have collectively committed to uphold. New Zealand shares the United Kingdom's outrage. We expect any other OPCW member with information about this incident to support a full and thorough investigation, so that the perpetrators are held to account.

Mr Chairperson, there remains a number of significant issues on the OPCW's agenda, including that of the Syrian Arab Republic file. That chemical weapons have been used by the Syrian Government on a number of occasions is a fact. This has already been clearly established by the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM). It is not good enough that any State Party here shies away from its responsibilities when questions of non-compliance arise. The integrity of the OPCW depends on each and every State Party addressing issues of non-compliance.

As we continue to regularly note, New Zealand has the utmost confidence in the professional and impartial work that has been carried out by the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission (FFM), the



Declarations Assessment Team (DAT), and the JIM. We commend the FFM teams continued investigations of allegations of chemical weapons use in the Syrian Arab Republic, including recent allegations of use in Ghouta. We also commend the professional work of the OPCW Special Mission deployed to the Syrian Arab Republic to provide technical assistance and evaluation in respect of items reportedly discovered by Syrian Armed Forces, which we note were not declarable under the Chemical Weapons Convention.

The FFM, DAT, and JIM have all produced clear and compelling conclusions. Discussions based on facts cannot simply be dismissed as ‘politicisation’, or shut down when the conclusions are considered by some to be inconvenient. Nor should States Parties tolerate efforts to undermine technical bodies. The New Zealand Government condemns the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian Government and by non-State actors in the strongest possible terms. Any Party which is found to have used chemical weapons must be held to account. We will continue to support the OPCW in its efforts to address this issue.

New Zealand remains deeply disappointed that the mandate of the JIM was not renewed and that the Executive Council has yet to agree a decision on the seventh report of the JIM. Despite this disappointing outcome, this is not the end of the road when it comes to accountability for chemical weapons use in the Syrian Arab Republic. New Zealand welcomes initiatives such as the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for the Syrian Arab Republic (IIIM) and the International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons.

In our view, the Syrian Government must also cooperate with the OPCW and the DAT to resolve the outstanding issues in its declaration. Consultations between the OPCW and the Syrian Government have now dragged on for several years. We note that the documentation recently provided to the DAT by the Syrian authorities have failed to resolve the outstanding issues remaining on the Syrian declaration. Meaningful cooperation is needed from the Syrian authorities. All States Parties need to work together to support the OPCW’s efforts to have this issue resolved.

Director-General, we thank you and the OPCW staff for your tireless commitment to address these issues. Please be assured that New Zealand will continue to work with you in pursuit of the Convention’s goal of a safer world, free of chemical weapons.

Thank you.

- - - 0 - - -