



OPCW

Executive Council

Fiftieth Meeting
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AUSTRALIA

**STATEMENT BY H.E. DR BRETT MASON
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF AUSTRALIA TO THE OPCW
AT THE FIFTIETH MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairman,

Almost 20 years ago, States Parties gathered to found the OPCW. We came together, nearly every country on earth now, to rid the world of toxic chemicals used as weapons of war.

To quote from the Chemical Weapons Convention, our Convention, States Parties determined “for the sake of all mankind to exclude completely the possibility of the use of chemical weapons”. That is what we decided, and that is what we signed up for.

And yet today, a full century after their first major use in armed conflict, we see clear, impartial evidence that can only lead us to conclude that toxic chemicals were used by a State Party to the Convention against its own people, against its own civilians.

I therefore thank you for convening today’s Executive Council meeting. These are vital for keeping this assembly focused on the difficult challenges we still face in ridding the Syrian Arab Republic of chemical weapons once and for all.

They are also necessary to allow Council members to act upon important developments, such as the three recent reports of the Fact-Finding Missions.

On behalf of Australia, may I commend the professionalism and impartiality of the Technical Secretariat in carrying out its investigations in the Syrian Arab Republic.

Since 2013, we have seen these terrible weapons become more and more common in the Syrian civil war.

Sarin, chlorine, and now sulfur mustard.

Taken together with the Fact-Finding Mission reports from last year, the investigation into the reported attacks in the Idlib province, points to the systematic use of chlorine gas against the Syrian Arab Republic’s people. And consistently, the evidence points to the use of helicopters to drop these chemical weapons.



It is true. It is not for the Fact-Finding Missions to attribute responsibility and deliver justice. Those mandates lie with the Joint Investigative Mechanism and the United Nations Security Council, and I applaud the OPCW for its invaluable contribution to those efforts.

However, Australia is in no doubt that the Assad regime and its airborne capability is responsible for these attacks in Idlib, which have resulted in at least six deaths and untold suffering.

And now, it appears that this systematic use of chlorine to terrorise the Syrian people has been followed by attacks using sulfur mustard, likely by ISIS.

In the strongest possible terms, Australia condemns the use of toxic chemicals as weapons, by anyone under any circumstance. The world learned this lesson one hundred years ago.

These are war crimes, they must not be tolerated. Impunity must be confronted. The perpetrators must be identified and they must be brought to justice.

Today, Australia urges all Executive Council members to adopt the draft decision before you and register the Council's unqualified condemnation of these crimes.

Mr Chairman, I thank you.

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