



Fifty-Sixth Meeting  
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**AUSTRALIA**

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

Mr Chairperson, colleagues,

I do wonder how many more times we will gather here to discuss the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic?

How many more times must we reconvene to examine the facts?

How many more times must we recount the horrors?

How many more times must we redress the Syrian Arab Republic's failure to declare?

How many times is enough, before the Syrian Arab Republic stops using chemical weapons and declares fully its chemical weapons arsenal?

How many times before the world, as one, condemns it?

It is enough to test any delegation's resolve. And, certainly, the optimism (believe me) of any individual.

But Mr Chairperson, I believe, and Australia still hopes, that we, our Organisation, can make a difference. That we can take our oft-cited refrain denouncing the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere, and under any circumstances and that we can make this refrain not just a convenient slogan, not just words, not just rhetoric but, instead, a prohibition. That is what our Convention demands: prohibiting chemical weapons. And that responsibility falls to us.

But this will take some courage. It is much easier to sing our common refrain than single out a recalcitrant State Party.

Mr Chairperson, I can understand a reluctance by some States Parties to take sides, not to align. I think we all understand that.

But I find it difficult to understand the reluctance by some to condemn a State Party for using chemical weapons. This is not about taking sides. We should all be on the same side – all of us opposing the use of chemical weapons. After all, our common refrain demands it and so does our duty – the pledge of the nations we represent and to one another.

The strong and confident seventh report by the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) found the Syrian Arab Republic responsible for releasing sarin at Khan Shaykhun on 4



April 2017. The JIM also found that sarin samples from Khan Shaykhun most likely match a precursor from the Syrian Arab Republic's (undeclared) original stockpile.

The JIM has found that the Syrian Arab Republic and the terrorist group ISIL have used chemical weapons. And our Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) has found sarin yet again in the Syrian Arab Republic. Only a renewed JIM mandate will allow us to determine responsibility.

We now know, the Syrian Arab Republic possesses chemical weapons.

We now know, the Syrian Arab Republic has used chemical weapons against innocent civilians on at least four occasions.

And we now know, the Syrian Arab Republic has failed to declare accurately its chemical weapons.

Let us no longer talk about the "alleged use" of chemical weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic for this is not only misleading, but also dangerous. It sends a green light to would be criminals that our Organisation – our Organisation charged with prohibiting chemical weapons – might not condemn those very States Parties who use chemical weapons.

Are States Parties who do not accept the findings of the JIM and the proven use of chemical weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic, honestly arguing that the problem lies here, with our Organisation, with our commitment and our honesty, with our investigators and our FFM and our JIM? That all along, the Syrian Arab Republic has been unfairly maligned and that the fault all along lay with us - the OPCW, and its organs and technical experts?

Does anyone believe that? That somehow the findings of chemical weapons use by the Syrian Arab Republic is just a giant mistake by the OPCW and the JIM. That culpability somehow lies with us – not with the Syrian Arab Republic.

Ladies and gentlemen, let us not lose sight of the true crime and true criminals. We must not blame the messenger.

Colleagues, Australia believes there is no real choice here. The evidence is overwhelming that chemical weapons have been used and that crimes have been committed.

If we are not willing to take action against a State Party that has repeatedly used chemical weapons we may condemn our Organisation to a relic of the past – an organisation that once ably supervised the destruction of chemical weapons but was unable to stop their use or re-emergence.

If we say we are against chemical weapons, and our Organisation presents us with proof of use by the Syrian Arab Republic, then we must condemn the Syrian Arab Republic.

Australia would like to believe, Mr Chairperson, that colleagues in this room, representing nearly every man, woman and child on Earth, will take action against the Syrian Arab Republic and its wilful disregard of our international norm against the use of chemical weapons.

And that finally our common refrain will be sung in chorus and backed by united action.

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