



OPCW

Executive Council

Fifty-Seventh Meeting
4 April 2018

EC-M-57/NAT.15
4 April 2018
ENGLISH only

AUSTRALIA

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

Mr Chairperson, colleagues,

Today, 4 April, marks one month since a military-grade nerve agent originally developed by the Russian Federation was used in a targeted attack in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Australia stands with the people of the United Kingdom in their collective call for immediate answers.

Australia stands with the Government of the United Kingdom in its call for a plausible explanation for how the nerve agent came to be on its sovereign soil.

Australia stands with the United Kingdom and all States Parties who seek explanations and answers for this brazen attack – the first offensive use of chemical weapons in Europe since the Second World War.

Mr Chairperson,

This attack threatened the national security of the United Kingdom.

This attack endangered the safety of a peaceful suburban neighbourhood, harming innocent members of the community.

As our Prime Minister has made clear, Australia utterly condemns this assault on the sovereignty of the United Kingdom and this flagrant breach of the rule of law. It directly challenges the global non-proliferation regime and the international rules-based order on which all of us rely.

The international community needs to demonstrate zero tolerance for these acts.

Mr Chairperson,

Australia has full confidence in the impartiality and competence of the OPCW to investigate the Salisbury attack thoroughly and with due process.



We urge all members of this Organisation to offer their full support to the United Kingdom and to the OPCW investigation.

Mr Chairperson, we do not support the Russian Federation's call to conduct a joint investigation with the United Kingdom. No member should seek to hinder, obstruct and obfuscate an investigation by our Organisation – or seek to undermine our well-established process.

Mr Chairperson,

Together, over the last twenty years, we have built our Organisation so that its technical experts can provide independent analysis, advice and verification on just such matters. Our Organisation's Technical Secretariat has distinguished itself in investigating allegations of chemical weapons use in the Syrian Arab Republic, and in supporting States Parties with requests for assistance, as in Iraq and Libya.

We expect our Organisation will distinguish itself yet again in its independent and thorough analysis of environmental and biomedical samples collected after the Salisbury attack.

We await the findings of our technical experts with anticipation, but respect this investigation must proceed without political influence or interference.

Australia calls on the Russian Federation to cooperate fully and in good faith, and to provide answers to the questions rightly posed to it in accordance with the Chemical Weapons Convention.

We do not consider the timing of this meeting as appropriate, nor do we consider it appropriate for the Executive Council to pre-empt the findings of our Organisation's investigation.

Mr Chairperson,

We are mindful too that we are not engaged here today in simply a bilateral dispute. This incident affects us all.

If we don't stand up and demand answers for this unlawful use of chemical weapons in the United Kingdom, then no community can be safe.

Mr Chairperson,

Today, as we earlier acknowledged with the dignity of a minute's silence, 4 April, also marks 12 months since the community of Khan Shaykhun was attacked with nerve agent sarin by the Syrian regime – a fact confirmed by the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism.

Let us also not forget this community. While expressing our sympathy for the victims, we should also express our regret at the continuing failure of this Executive Council to take the necessary action in response to that proven attack.

Mr Chairperson, my colleagues, I thank you.