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NEW ZEALAND

**STATEMENT BY MR HEATH FISHER
HEAD OF DELEGATION OF NEW ZEALAND
AT THE FOURTH SPECIAL SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE
OF THE STATES PARTIES TO REVIEW THE OPERATION OF THE CHEMICAL
WEAPONS CONVENTION**

Thank you, Mr Chairperson.

New Zealand joins others in congratulating you on your appointment as Chairperson of the Fourth Review Conference and I assure you of my delegation's full support and cooperation.

Our thanks also go to Director-General Arias for your leadership of the OPCW. The Organisation continues to face a host of challenges but, under your able guidance, it is living up to its ideals. You continue to have New Zealand's full support in carrying out your mandate.

New Zealand remains a strong supporter of the Chemical Weapons Convention (hereinafter "the Convention"), a fundamental pillar of the international disarmament and non-proliferation architecture.

Today, it is deeply regrettable that we must continue to state clearly and unequivocally that the use of chemical weapons is unacceptable. As such, it is disappointing in the extreme that, in the five years since this Conference last met, we-as a community of nations-have had cause to denounce instances of chemical weapons use in Syria, in Iraq, in Malaysia and in the United Kingdom.

It is therefore now critical that all States Parties demonstrate their commitment to strengthening the Convention, the OPCW and its ideals. We need to do this through actions, not just words.

New Zealand will continue to condemn all uses of chemical weapons, by anyone, at any time, under any circumstances, and seek accountability for those who use them. We must uphold this fundamental obligation of International Humanitarian Law. As the United Nations Secretary-General stated in his agenda for disarmament: "Each and every use of a chemical weapon is an international crime".

New Zealand condemns the repeated use of chemical weapons in the Syrian civil war, and we remind the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic of the urgent need to comply fully with the commitments it made when it signed up to this Convention. We reiterate that the Syrian



Government must cooperate fully, and in good faith, with the OPCW in order to finally and effectively resolve the gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies identified in its declaration, and in line with its obligations as a state party to the Convention.

New Zealand is deeply concerned about the impunity with which perpetrators have carried out recent chemical weapons attacks. That is why we were proud to support the adoption of the decision by the Conference of the States Parties in June, a vital step to reinforce the global ban against the use of chemical weapons. Although a worthy goal, we cannot use consensus as an excuse to prevent States Parties from taking action to uphold the Convention.

It was necessary for the Conference to authorise the OPCW to put in place arrangements to independently and impartially identify the perpetrators of chemical weapons attacks in Syria. Such arrangements were legitimate, vital and urgent, given the regrettable veto of the extension of the Joint Investigative Mechanism.

New Zealand also supports the implementation of a mechanism for attribution of chemical weapons use elsewhere. New Zealand has also joined the International Partnership Against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons to give further voice to the need for attribution.

We welcome this week's adoption of the OPCW programme and budget, which will provide much needed temporary and additional funding to ensure that the Director-General can establish these attribution arrangements. It will also provide the OPCW with additional finances to strengthen its cyber-security infrastructure which is, regrettably, an ever more urgent requirement. It is in all of our interests that the OPCW be provided the resources to keep its infrastructure secure.

Mr Chair, we are at a significant waypoint. This Fourth Review Conference provides an opportunity to reflect on how much we have achieved, and also on how far we have to go to achieve a world truly free of Chemical weapons. There is much to celebrate and commend, with 96% of the world's declared chemical weapons now destroyed.

We cannot be complacent, however. The OPCW must focus on preventing the re-emergence of these weapons. Just as we must not tolerate chemical weapons use, we cannot allow them to fall into the hands of non-State actors or terrorist groups. The use of chemical weapons by ISIS should be an awful warning to us all.

We recognise the importance of preventing the diversion of chemicals for hostile purposes throughout their entire lifecycle. We applaud the Technical Secretariat's efforts to facilitate the exchange of information, ideas, and expertise on chemical safety and security between the States Parties, and encourage support for this ongoing work.

In 2017 New Zealand sponsored the first OPCW Workshop on International Chemical Security Coordination, and sees merit in exploring the resulting recommendation for the establishment of a coordination mechanism.

New Zealand has highlighted a number of areas within the OPCW's work that we consider could be strengthened in order to further support the Organisation's mandate. These include capacity building for states parties to deal with chemical incidents, sampling and analysis for verification purposes, strengthening and upgrading the OPCW's laboratories, and greater

flexibility in being able to respond to emergencies globally with the Rapid Response and Assistance Mission.

We, along with several other States Parties, remain concerned by the use of central nervous system acting chemicals in aerosol form for law enforcement purposes. The serious health and safety risks posed by such chemicals, and the possibility of their deliberate misuse, are deeply troubling. We hope that this Review Conference takes the opportunity to commence policy discussions in the OPCW on this important issue.

New Zealand is pleased to advise that we have developed a national position on aerosolised central nervous system acting agents. New Zealand does not, nor does it intend to, develop, produce, stockpile or use central nervous system-acting agents in law enforcement operations. We will only employ chemical agents which conform to the definition of riot control agents contained within the Convention, and which have been endorsed as such by the OPCW's Scientific Advisory Board.

Mr Chair, the Conference of the States Parties and the Review Conferences should be open and inclusive events. New Zealand regrets that the General Committee was unable to come to a consensus on the need to include all civil society applicants.

Finally, we welcome the new States Parties to the Convention since 2013. We urge the four countries that have not acceded to the Convention to do so as a priority. Universalisation of this important treaty, and the destruction of all chemical weapons, is the best way to ensure that a hundred years after their horrific use in the Great War-chemical weapons truly become history.

Thank you Mr Chairperson. I hereby request that this statement be circulated as an official statement of this Conference.

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