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AUSTRALIA

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR MATTHEW NEUHAUS
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF AUSTRALIA TO THE OPCW
AT THE NINETY-FIRST SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chair,

I would like to start by congratulating you on your appointment as Chair of the Executive Council (“the Council”). I look forward to working with you over the coming year.

I would like to pay tribute to the previous Council Chair Jana Reinišová for the fair and diplomatic way she conducted her role.

Mr Chair, I would like to thank the Director-General and his team for their excellent work and response to the call by States Parties to commence a serious discussion about workforce planning within the OPCW.

Implementing human resource reform is never easy, as many of us can attest to. But it is necessary for the proper long-term functioning of any organisation. Director-General, you have the full support of Australia as you move ahead with this important task. And I hope you will have the support of all members here.

Workforce reform is not the only issue on which we can make progress. I want to again thank the NAM and China for their non-paper. The paper and subsequent discussion has reinforced that there is strong and broad support amongst States Parties to work together to ensure that the OPCW remains best placed to help countries tackle the threat of chemical weapons.

I would like to acknowledge the outstanding work carried out by the co-facilitators, Ambassador Vásquez Gómez and Ambassador Puja. Australia would strongly support continuing the facilitation process under their capable leadership and we call on all States Parties to participate constructively in that process to secure a good outcome.

Mr Chair, I would like to acknowledge the continued engagement between Syrian authorities and the OPCW Declaration Assessment Team through two further rounds of consultations and related activities. We welcome these efforts to prioritise issues and to develop a roadmap for future activities.



However, it is concerning that gaps, inconsistencies, and discrepancies identified in Syria's initial declaration continue. Almost six years after Syria's accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention ("the Convention"), it is time that these issues are resolved.

Australia was extremely disappointed to learn that Syrian authorities refused to issue a visa to the Coordinator of the IIT to take part in discussions in Damascus. This, Mr Chair, is unacceptable in our view, and unhelpful.

The IIT has been tasked by States Parties to carry out a job and it should not be faced with any restrictions on doing this. Syrian authorities themselves claim there has been use of chemical weapons within their territory. They owe it to the Syrian people to work with the OPCW to investigate and identify the perpetrators of these chemical attacks, no matter who they are.

Australia calls on the Syrian Arab Republic to cooperate fully with all areas of the OPCW, including the IIT. Australia has full confidence in the work of the OPCW in Syria and looks forward to the continuing regular updates from the Secretariat regarding its progress.

Mr Chair, finally I would like to take a moment to talk about central nervous system (CNS)-acting chemicals.

Year after year, delegations in this room have heard Australia, Switzerland, and many others call for the start of a discussion on the dangers of the use of aerosolised CNS-acting chemicals for law enforcement purposes. Our disappointment at not having been able to commence a formal process is well known.

But we have been heartened by the level of discussion. States Parties have asked questions, they have attended briefings, they have held bilateral discussions with technical experts. An inclusive discussion has, in effect, been underway.

Australia believes the time has come to move this issue to the next stage. After a decade of informal discussion, debate and outreach, we feel the time has come to bring the issue before this Council and for States Parties to act.

We would like to start a process with others that we hope will ultimately bring before this Council a decision that reflects our concerns regarding the use of aerosolised CNS-acting chemicals for law enforcement purposes.

Mr Chair,

As we have for the past decade and more, Australia will continue to work with all States Parties to address this long overdue challenge to the Convention, and we look forward to working constructively with all delegations.