



OPCW

Executive Council

Ninety-First Session

9 – 12 July 2019

EC-91/NAT.30

9 July 2019

ENGLISH only

NEW ZEALAND

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR LYNDAL WALKER
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE OPCW
AT THE NINETY-FIRST SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Thank you, Mr Chairperson.

Let me begin by congratulating you, Ambassador, on your appointment as Chair. You can be certain of New Zealand's full support throughout your term. Like others, I wish to also thank Ambassador Reinišová for her service and stewardship of this Executive Council ("the Council") over the past year.

Moving now to the Syrian chemical weapons dossier:

Firstly, Mr Chairperson, we wish to register our support for the professional, independent, and impartial work of the Technical Secretariat's ("the Secretariat") various teams – from the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) to the Fact-Finding Mission and Declarations Assessment Team (DAT).

In particular, we highlight our support for the IIT as it commences its work to identify the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic. We welcome the IIT's identification of nine priority incidents on which it intends to focus its investigative work. This is an important step in ensuring accountability for those responsible for the heinous use of chemical weapons in Syria. The IIT has New Zealand's full support, and we look forward to receiving its first report in due course.

In that light, we were extremely concerned to learn of the Syrian Government's refusal to issue a visa to the IIT's Coordinator. The Syrian Government has an obligation to implement the June 2018 decision adopted by the Conference of the States Parties – this means providing the IIT with access, as requested. Furthermore, Syria must assist and fully cooperate with the OPCW, as reflected under paragraph 7 of Article VII of the Chemical Weapons Convention ("the Convention"), as well as under UN Security Council Resolution 2118. We urge the Syrian Government to fully honour these obligations in good faith.

With regards to the work of the OPCW Declarations Assessment Team, I wish to thank the DAT for its recent briefing to State Parties on its ongoing work to resolve the remaining gaps, discrepancies, and inconsistencies relating to Syria's declaration.



New Zealand has reiterated (on numerous occasions) its strong support for the DAT's professionalism, and its perseverance. Indeed, despite the DAT's best efforts over the course of five years of operation, there has – regrettably - been little progress to show.

This lack of cooperation is concerning. We note the recent OPCW reports which have indicated that Syria has removed remnants of destroyed production equipment and chemical munitions. As stated in these reports, the Syrian Arab Republic and the DAT had agreed to preserve these remnants, which would have been used to assist the DAT in its assessments.

Such developments are of real concern. We again underline that the Syrian Arab Republic must cooperate with the DAT in order to fully and finally resolve the remaining outstanding issues relating to its declaration. It is incumbent on the Syrian Government to honour the commitments it made when it signed up to this Convention.

I ask that this statement be made an official document of this meeting and published on the external server and public website.

Thank you, Mr Chairperson.

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