



OPCW

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NEW ZEALAND

**STATEMENT BY MS ERIN MORRISS DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE
OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE OPCW AT THE TWENTY FOURTH SESSION
OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES**

Thank you, Chair.

New Zealand joins others in congratulating you on your appointment as Chair of the Twenty-Fourth Session of this session of the conference. Our thanks also go to Director-General Ambassador Fernando Arias for his continued leadership of the OPCW. You have New Zealand's full confidence and support.

New Zealand remains a strong supporter of the Chemical Weapons Convention, a fundamental pillar of the international disarmament and non-proliferation architecture. However, despite the progress made in recent years, the Convention and the norms that underpin it are facing serious challenges. In the last few years alone, we've had cause to denounce instances of chemical weapons use in Syria, Iraq, Malaysia and the United Kingdom. At a time when we should be on the verge of eradicating these weapons for good, we are instead seeing their resurgence. It is deeply regrettable that, in 2019, we must continue to state clearly and unequivocally that the use of chemical weapons is unacceptable. States parties cannot be complacent if we wish to safeguard and strengthen the Convention for the future. So what can we, as States Parties, do?

First of all, we need to see renewed efforts to resolve—finally—the issues relating to the Syrian Government's declaration to the OPCW. At a minimum, we need confidence that Syria's chemical weapons programme has been fully declared and destroyed. It is disappointing in the extreme that, in the five years since the establishment of the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) in 2014, the numerous gaps, inconsistencies, and discrepancies remain unresolved. This lack of meaningful cooperation is concerning. We call on Syria to cooperate fully and in good faith with the DAT to completely resolve these issues, in compliance with its obligations as a State Party to the Convention.

Second, we must support the Investigation and Identification Team's (IIT) efforts to identify the perpetrators behind proven instances of chemical weapons use in Syria. The IIT is a crucial and necessary means of identifying the perpetrators behind these horrific attacks. Mr Oñate-Laborde and his team have our full support and we look forward to the issuing of the IIT's first report in due course. On a related note, we again register our concerns that in March this year, the Syrian Government chose to deny members of the IIT entry visas to carry out their work. This is unacceptable. 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, the Syrian Government must assist and fully cooperate with the OPCW, as required under paragraph 7 of Article VII of the Convention, as well as under United Nations Security Council resolution 2118. We urge the Syrian Government to fully comply with these obligations in good faith. It is in everyone's interests—including Syria—that the IIT is able to carry out its important work.

Third, we need to address new and emerging threats. The horrifying instances of chemical weapons use in Salisbury and Amesbury last year highlight the urgent need to take action with regard to the novichok agents used in those attacks. The joint proposal, submitted by Canada, the Netherlands, and the United States of America, which seeks to add two new families of chemicals to Schedule 1 of the Annex on Chemicals to the Chemical Weapons Convention, will help to achieve this. We also note the modified decision, submitted by the Russian Federation, which seeks to introduce changes to Schedule 1 of the Annex on Chemicals. New Zealand supports the adoption of both decisions. We thank all four sponsoring States Parties for their constructive approach to these discussions.

Fourth, we need to ensure that the OPCW has the financial resources and support to carry out its full programme of work. New Zealand fully supports the 2020 Programme and Budget. We see this as fair and reasonable, covering the full spectrum of the OPCW's work.

As we look beyond this session of the conference, we recognise that there are further important issues on the horizon that this Conference will need to address. Of particular importance will be addressing the use of central nervous system(CNS)-acting chemicals in aerosol form for law enforcement purposes. We welcome the decision presented by Australia, Switzerland, and the United States of America earlier this year, relating to the use of CNS-acting chemicals. New Zealand shares the concerns expressed by numerous States Parties regarding the serious health and safety risks posed by such chemicals, and the possibility of their deliberate misuse. We look forward to a discussion with other States Parties to consider how best to take this issue forward.

Of course, amid the many challenges facing this Conference, there is also much to celebrate and commend. Like countless others here, New Zealand is doing its part to support the OPCW in its work.

- This year, New Zealand was proud to contribute €64,000 toward the OPCW's trust fund for Syria missions. New Zealand's contribution will assist the OPCW in carrying out its important work, including investigating and attributing responsibility for documented use of chemical weapons in Syria.
- We were also pleased to make a further contribution of €100,000 to the trust fund for the new Centre for Chemistry and Technology. The new centre will allow the OPCW to enhance its international cooperation, detection capabilities, and response measures.

Mr Chair, New Zealand was also pleased to see the OPCW hold its first ever regional meeting for Pacific Islands Forum member states in Fiji earlier this year. This was an excellent opportunity to build further knowledge and expertise regarding chemical emergency response, planning, and management. New Zealand welcomes the OPCW's continued engagement in the Pacific region and its cooperation with the Pacific Islands forum – this is an important means of improving chemical security in the Pacific.

Finally, the conferences of the States Parties and 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. In that regard, New Zealand joins with the other States Parties who have co-sponsored a joint statement concerning accreditation of NGOs for the Twenty-Fourth Session of the Conference of the States Parties. We strongly support this joint statement, and note our concerns regarding the actions being taken by certain States Parties to block accreditation of certain NGOs.

Mr Chair, New Zealand remains firmly committed to the achievement of a world without chemical weapons. There is of course much work left to be done. The atrocities witnessed in recent years only underline the need for renewed focus and determination in pursuit of chemical disarmament. And as the United Nations Secretary-General has previously stated: “each and every use of a chemical weapon is an international crime”. New Zealand stands with others in our collective efforts to rid the world of chemical weapons, and to hold those who use them to account.

Thank you, Mr Chair.

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