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**AUSTRALIA**

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR MATTHEW NEUHAUS  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF AUSTRALIA TO THE OPCW AT THE  
TWENTY-FOURTH SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES**

Mr Chair,

May I join colleagues in congratulating you on your election as Chairperson of this Conference of the States Parties. Australia wishes you all the very best. You have our full support. I would also like to thank the Director-General Fernando Arias and the staff of the Technical Secretariat for their professionalism and tireless efforts throughout the year. We can be proud of them.

This time last year some were questioning whether the Chemical Weapons Convention had failed. We had witnessed repeated chemical weapons use in Syria, and even the use of nerve agents by foreign actors in Malaysia and the UK.

I am proud to stand here today—with my colleagues, with the Director-General and with the staff of the Technical Secretariat—and confirm that the Chemical Weapons Convention has not failed. In fact it has been strengthened. Collectively, States Parties have shown that they can and will respond promptly and effectively to those who challenge the Convention, and its implementation. However, there remains much work to be done. The international community must remain steadfast in its counter-proliferation work. There are no circumstances which justify the use of chemical weapons. It is unacceptable that more than six years after acceding to the Convention, we are still discussing Syria's declaration discrepancies. The Syrian Arab Republic must fully cooperate with the OPCW. This is a requirement under Article VII of the Chemical Weapons Convention, and under United Nations Security Council resolution 2118. We need to see renewed efforts to resolve this issue once and for all.

It is also unacceptable that the Syrian Arab Republic has failed to cooperate with the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT), including by refusing to issue a visa to the Head of the Team. The IIT has been mandated by States Parties to carry out an important role and it should not be faced with any restrictions on doing this.

We are pleased that the IIT has nevertheless, under the very able leadership of Ambassador Onate, continued to carry out the task assigned to it, that is, to identify those responsible for chemical weapons attacks in Syria. We look forward to issuance of the IIT's first report in due course.



As Australia has repeatedly said, it is absolutely appropriate that the OPCW, as the implementing body of the Chemical Weapons Convention, be able to undertake investigations in order to identify those who violate the global norm against the use of chemical weapons, anywhere. Identifying perpetrators of chemical weapons use is a crucial, necessary step if we are to deter others who might think they can use such weapons with impunity. Australia calls on all States Parties to strongly support the OPCW Director-General and the Technical Secretariat, in carrying out this vitally important role.

We also appreciate the Secretariat's work in helping to build and develop the capacity of States Parties to meet their obligations under the Convention.

Mr Chair, we need to ensure that the OPCW has the resources to carry out its important work, including on attribution. Australia fully supports the 2020 Programme and Budget. The budget is fair and reasonable and demonstrates the broad spectrum of the OPCW's work. We are particularly pleased with the proposal to allocate some of the cash surplus to strengthen capacity in national laboratories. We call on all States Parties to support the 2020 Programme and Budget. We also strongly urge all States Parties to pay their assessed contributions in full and in a timely manner. A lag in the receipt of assessed contributions puts pressure on the OPCW's finances and limits the Technical Secretariat's ability to carry out important programmatic activities.

This session of the conference is an historic moment for the Convention as we look to update the schedules of chemicals for the first time. We would like to thank all sponsors of the two technical change proposals, Canada, the Netherlands, the United States of America and the Russian Federation, for their efforts and for coming together in the proposals now before us in a common approach to strengthen the Convention. We look forward to both proposals being adopted at this session of the conference.

Australia is pleased to support the joint statement delivered by Ireland concerning accreditation of NGOs for the Twenty-Fourth Session of the Conference of the States Parties. Australia has a long history of supporting civil society engagement with multilateral forums, and supported the decision to open this Conference of States Parties to civil society groups.

In October Australia, together with Switzerland, the United States and 21 other co-sponsors, introduced to the Executive Council a draft decision stating that the aerosolised use of central nervous system (CNS)-acting chemicals is understood to be inconsistent with law enforcement purposes as a "purpose not prohibited" by the Convention. Support for such a decision is strong and growing. After more than a decade of outreach and advocacy, States Parties recognise that the time has come for this issue to be brought before the Executive Council and, ultimately, before the Conference of the States Parties. The SAB has considered this issue extensively and concluded that no chemical has been discovered or developed that satisfies the requirements of being able to produce almost instantaneous incapacitating effects, which will last for some hours with no health risks to the exposed individuals.

When CNS-acting chemicals are used in aerosolised form, it is virtually impossible to control the dosage received by individuals. This, combined with the known toxicity of these chemicals, is why Australia believes that their use in aerosolised form for law enforcement purposes is inconsistent with the Convention. Australia encourages all States Parties to

engage constructively on this important topic. We welcome your attendance at the side event on this topic tomorrow at lunchtime.

Mr Chair, there has been much discussion globally about the state of the international rules-based order. Australia acknowledges that the international system needs to modernise, but it must also stand firm on the well-established norms that protect our peace and security.

The norm against the use of chemical weapons is not an issue for only some countries. It is the fundamental principle we all agreed to when signing on to the Convention. It is in all our collective security interests to uphold the well-established international norm against any chemical weapons use. States Parties are the elements that comprise the international system. It is therefore for each of us to speak out against the use of chemical weapons, anytime, anywhere and under any circumstance.

Upholding the global prohibition against the use of chemical weapons, and preventing their re-emergence, requires the resolve of all States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention. I was most fortunate to be there at the beginning and we must keep the spirit of those who drafted our Convention, who in the words of its Preamble were “determined for the sake of all mankind to exclude completely the possibility of the use of chemical weapons”. Let us not forget.

Thank you Mr Chair.

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