

Statement by HE Mr Matthew Neuhaus
Permanent Representative of Australia to the OPCW
on the release of the first report of the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team on
the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic

The Australian Government welcomes the release of the OPCW's first report under its mandate of investigating and attributing responsibility for the reported use of chemical weapons in Syria.

Australia notes with great concern the conclusion of the OPCW's Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) report that there are reasonable grounds to believe the Syrian Arab Air Force used sarin as a chemical weapon in Ltamenah on 24 and again on 30 March 2017; and the IIT's further conclusion that there are reasonable grounds to believe the Syrian Arab Air Force used chlorine as a chemical weapon in Ltamenah on 25 March 2017.

Australia commends the IIT for its rigorous, impartial and independent analysis. Its findings are the result of nine months of meticulous and impartial research and analysis.

In reaching its conclusions, the IIT considered possible scenarios of what could have happened in Ltamenah on those three days in March 2017. After detailed assessment based on factual evidence, it concluded that the Syrian Arab Air Force used chemical weapons.

This conclusion confirms that the Syrian Arab Republic is in breach of the Chemical Weapons Convention. Syria is a State Party to the Convention, and its military forces have been identified as using chemical weapons. The actions by the Syrian regime represent a grave and serious violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

The Syrian regime's ongoing failure to fully declare its chemical weapons program, as noted in the IIT report, is yet another violation of the Convention. Syria must fully comply with its obligations and ensure the complete dismantling and destruction of its chemical weapons program.

The world cannot stand idly by without taking action to prevent the use of chemical weapons, which use violates international law. It is imperative that all States Parties work together to ensure that all users of chemical weapons, as well as those who command, enable or shield them are brought to account.

Australia recognises that the IIT's mandate relates to the technical attribution of the use of chemical weapons. The IIT is not, however, a prosecutorial body. It is for other appropriate institutions to take forward the investigation and prosecution of individuals for crimes committed in the course of the conflict in Syria. Australia strongly supports the ongoing information sharing between the OPCW and bodies such as the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM).

Australia's position is clear: the use of chemical warfare agents or toxic chemicals as weapons – anywhere, by anyone, and under any circumstances – is prohibited, reprehensible, unjustified, and cannot be tolerated.

It is now the responsibility of States Parties, and the international community, to act.