



**21 April 2020**

**Statement by H.E. Ms Lyndal Walker, New Zealand Permanent Representative to the OPCW,  
on the release of the first report of the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team into  
chemical weapons use in Ltamenah in Syria on 24, 25 and 30 March 2017.**

The use of chemical weapons is an egregious violation of international law and can constitute a war crime and a crime against humanity. It is a clear breach of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), which enshrines the total and global prohibition against such weapons and makes clear the international community's determination that chemical weapons must never be used again, under any circumstances. Any violation of this prohibition must be met with condemnation and accountability.

The 8 April report of the OPCW's Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) into the three incidents of chemical weapon use in Ltamenah, Syria, on 24, 25 and 30 March 2017 is an important step to this end. New Zealand welcomes the release of the report and is gravely concerned by its findings.

In its compelling report, the IIT has concluded that there are reasonable grounds to believe that the Syrian Arab Air Force used sarin as a chemical weapon in Ltamenah on 24 and 30 March 2017, and chlorine as a chemical weapon on 25 March 2017. The IIT report also highlights that attacks of such strategic nature would have only taken place on the basis of orders from the highest levels of the Syrian Arab Republic military command.

New Zealand condemns in the strongest possible terms the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian Arab Air Force. This flagrant disregard for international law has caused horrific suffering for the victims of these attacks, compounding the already brutal effects of the devastating and ongoing conflict in Syria. It must be met with the strongest possible response from States Parties to the CWC, both to uphold the integrity of the Convention and to send an unequivocal message to the victims and to the international community that there will be no impunity for such crimes. New Zealand stands ready to work closely with States Parties and the OPCW in all relevant fora to respond to the IIT's findings as quickly as possible.

Among those findings is further evidence of the Syrian Arab Republic's failure to fully declare its chemical weapons programme so it can be verifiably destroyed. New Zealand has consistently joined other States Parties to the CWC in urging the Syrian Arab Republic to submit complete and accurate declarations, as it is required to do under the Convention. With the IIT's report reminding us all of the ultimate consequences of the persistent and deliberate withholding of information, we again call on the Syrian Arab Republic to declare the full extent of its chemical weapons capability and to cooperate fully with the OPCW, including the IIT.

As a steadfast supporter of the CWC and the OPCW, New Zealand has full confidence in the work and conclusions of the OPCW, including the IIT. Consistent with its mandate, the IIT has conducted its important mission in a professional, independent and impartial manner, and has delivered the facts to States Parties. It now falls to us to take action, protect the Convention and ensure that those responsible for the use of chemical weapons are held to account.