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NEW ZEALAND

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

Mr Chairperson,

Let me begin by congratulating you, Ambassador Agustín Vásquez Gómez, on your appointment as the new Chairperson of the Executive Council. You can be assured of New Zealand's full support throughout your term. I wish to also thank Ambassador Andrea Perugini for his service and stewardship of this Council over the past year.

Taking into account the measures adopted by the host country and the need to reduce in-person meetings amidst the global COVID-19 crisis, New Zealand would like to thank the Technical Secretariat for finding a safe way to organise the Ninety-Fourth meeting of the Executive Council. While we have all had to adapt to new ways of operating in the current environment, the work of the OPCW remains vital to global disarmament and non-proliferation efforts that must continue. In the interests of openness and transparency, it is also critical that observers are able to participate in proceedings.

Our ability to meet is all the more important as the Executive Council considers the OPCW's Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) first report. The IIT concluded in its compelling report 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 is gravely concerned by these findings and we again condemn, in the strongest possible terms, the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian Arab Air Force.

The use of chemical weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic is an egregious violation of international law – it is a war crime and could constitute a crime against humanity. We must keep front of mind that these attacks caused horrific suffering for the victims, who were already deeply affected by the devastating, ongoing conflict in Syria. The three cases of confirmed use are a clear breach of, and indicate non-compliance with, the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC).

These actions 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 is also a co-sponsor for the initiative, presented last year by Australia, Switzerland, the United States of America, and a number of other countries, to address the use of central nervous system (CNS)-acting chemicals in aerosolised form for law enforcement purposes. We remain concerned about the serious health and safety risks posed by these chemicals and the possibility of their deliberate misuse. We want to ensure that this issue remains on the Council's agenda for future consideration.

Finally, as we put health and safety first in order to stop the spread of COVID-19, we have all had to adjust to a new normal. We would like to express our appreciation to colleagues who have sought to continue consultations and facilitations through virtual and paper-based processes in order to ensure our important work continues. As we look to the next Council meeting and ahead to the Conference of the States Parties in November, we encourage facilitators to continue to make as much progress as possible, with support from the Technical Secretariat.

Thank you, Mr Chairperson.

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