



National Statement by Australia

H.E. Ambassador Matthew Neuhaus, Permanent Representative of Australia to the OPCW

At the Ninety-Fifth session of the Executive Council, 6-9 October

Mr Chair,

Australia is appalled by the apparent use of a chemical weapon to poison Russian opposition figure, Alexei Navalny. The finding by German experts, independently confirmed by experts from two separate laboratories, that Mr Navalny was poisoned by a nerve-agent of the novichok group is deeply concerning. Australia condemns in the strongest terms the use of chemical weapons anytime, anywhere, by anyone.

We welcome the assistance provided by the OPCW through the deployment of a Technical Assistance Visit (TAV). This incident highlights the importance of ensuring the Technical Secretariat retains the capabilities required to respond quickly to requests from State Parties for technical assistance and technical evaluation.

Mr Chair, the Navalny incident involved a Russian citizen who fell ill on Russian territory. It is incumbent on the Russian Government to conduct a thorough and transparent investigation and to cooperate fully with others, including the OPCW. We call on Russia to do so.

Mr Chair, it is with deep frustration that Australia notes the OPCW Declaration Assessment Team (DAT's) protracted engagement with Syria. It is unacceptable that seven years on, Syria has not resolved all of the outstanding issues regarding its initial declaration of its chemical weapons stockpile and programme. It is unacceptable that chemical weapons have been used in Syria during this time. We call on Syria to redress its outstanding declaration issues immediately, in line with the direction of this Council in EC-94/DEC.2.

Mr Chair, I would like to thank the Technical Secretariat and the budget co-facilitators for their hard work in the lead up to this Executive Council session to deliver the best possible budget for the OPCW.

Like many of us, the OPCW has experienced unprecedented challenges, financial and operational, resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. We acknowledge the Technical Secretariat's efforts to respond to these challenges while working within a framework of a zero nominal growth budget.

The 2021 Programme and Budget as presented is fair and reasonable. It reflects the ongoing broad spectrum of the OPCW's work, but also the realities of the current difficult operating environment.

Australia calls on all members of this Council to support the budget as proposed and to support the important work of the OPCW and its staff. At the same time, we 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.

Mr Chair, Australia would like to thank the Technical Secretariat, in particular the Inspectorate Division, for its engagement with our National Authority to work through the impacts of COVID-19 on inspections.

Australia calls on the OPCW and States Parties to be flexible in order to allow inspections to continue. We encourage the Technical Secretariat to engage with States Parties early to allow time to work through issues such as immigration exemptions and mandatory quarantine requirements. We also encourage more sequential inspections within States Parties to minimise the impact of quarantine requirements.

Mr Chair, I am pleased that, together with Ambassador Dupuy of Uruguay, we have been able to progress our facilitation on Organisational Governance. I pay tribute to the work done by the former co-facilitators, Ambassador Puja of Indonesia and our Chair, Ambassador Gomez of El Salvador, which has left a solid basis on which to build.

I would like to thank the Technical Secretariat and States Parties for their flexibility and engagement. It is heartening – and a sign of the strength of this organisation and commitment of States Parties – that the COVID-19 restrictions have not prevented us from progressing this important work. There is still much to be done, but we are on our way.

Finally, I would like to conclude with a few comments regarding the draft decision that sets out our understanding regarding the aerosolised use of central nervous system acting chemicals (CNSACs) for law enforcement purposes, which Australia and others tabled at the Executive Council meeting in October 2019. We would especially like to thank the other co-sponsors for their support.

Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, we have continued to engage with States Parties. We value this engagement and look forward to continuing to work with States Parties on this important initiative.

Thank you Mr Chair.