



**NEW ZEALAND STATEMENT
TO THE TWENTY-FIFTH SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES
TO THE CHEMICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION**

30 November - 4 December 2020

Statement by H.E. Ambassador Lyndal Walker,
New Zealand Permanent Representative to the OPCW

Mr. Chairperson, Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa.

New Zealand wishes to congratulate His Excellency Ambassador José Antonio Zabalgaitia Trejo of Mexico on being appointed as Chair of the 25th Session of this Conference. You can be assured of New Zealand's full support throughout your term. We express our sincere appreciation to His Excellency Ambassador Krassimir Kostov of Bulgaria for his outstanding leadership as Chair of the 24th Session of the Conference, and his efforts to navigate preparations for the 25th Session in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We wish to convey our appreciation to Director-General Arias and all the OPCW Technical Secretariat staff for their efforts to continue the important work of the Organisation in the face of significant disruption caused by the pandemic. Through the Director-General's leadership of the OPCW and the diligence of the Technical Secretariat staff, we have collectively been able to achieve some important progress this year on permanently and verifiably eliminating chemical weapons and holding those who use chemical weapons to account. For example, the OPCW's Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) for Syria published its first report. We thank IIT Coordinator Mr. Santiago Oñate Laborde and his team for their efforts and we look forward to the publication of the next IIT reports in due course. The OPCW and its staff continue to have New Zealand's unwavering confidence and support, and we are grateful for their continued impartiality, transparency, and dedication to upholding the Chemical Weapons Convention.

We live in extraordinary times. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected us in all aspects of our lives, and has had an enormous impact on the world. While we have understandably needed to spend time and effort to respond and adjust to living and working in this 'new normal', our collective commitment to the Chemical Weapons Convention, as a fundamental pillar of the international disarmament and non-proliferation architecture, must remain undiminished. Indeed, we must reiterate and reinforce our efforts and strengthen the global disarmament and international rules-based system. We must hold Syria to account for its chemical weapons use. We must address the instance of chemical weapons use this year against Alexei Navalny. And we must stand firm against the baseless and erroneous attacks against the OPCW and its staff by a few States Parties seeking to undermine the Organisation for their own ends.

As we are all well aware, the IIT concluded that the Syrian Arab Air Force was responsible for three chemical weapons attacks in Ltamenah, Syria, in March 2017. New Zealand is deeply disappointed that the Syrian Arab Republic has failed to comply with the decision adopted at the July 2020 meeting of the Executive Council, which New Zealand co-sponsored, on "Addressing the Possession and Use of Chemical Weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic". Not only did the Syrian Arab Republic fail to complete any of the specific steps required of it, as detailed in the decision, but it also failed to cooperate or engage with the process.

The Syrian Arab Republic must not be allowed impunity for its use of chemical weapons. The victims of these egregious attacks deserve justice. We call on the Syrian Arab Republic to cooperate fully, and in good faith, with States Parties and the OPCW, and comply with all its obligations as a State Party to the Convention, including to declare and destroy its entire chemical weapons programme.

New Zealand remains deeply troubled by the poisoning of Mr Alexei Navalny with a nerve agent from the Novichok group of chemicals, which was verified by three independent laboratories and the OPCW. Any use of chemical weapons anywhere, by anyone, under any circumstances, is unacceptable. As such, we consider this use of a chemical weapon against Mr Navalny to be highly repugnant and an affront to the global rules and norms that we have collectively committed to uphold. New Zealand is greatly concerned that we have again witnessed the use of a Novichok nerve agent this year. At last year's CSP, we historically agreed to amend Schedule 1 of the Annex of Chemicals to the Chemical Weapons Convention to ban specific formulations of Novichok nerve agents. While the Novichok found to have poisoned Mr Navalny had similar structural characteristics, but was different, to the Novichoks added to the Annex last year, such an act serves to undermine and circumvent our great collective achievement last year. Serious questions remain unanswered. We reiterate our call on the Russian Federation to cooperate fully with the international community and the OPCW to provide answers.

Mr. Chair,

As States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention, we must ensure the OPCW is not undermined through lack of resources. We must provide the Organisation with the financial support it needs to carry out its mandate and its full programme of work. New Zealand fully supports the 2021 Programme and Budget and acknowledges the importance of States Parties being flexible in light of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. We see the proposed budget as fair and reasonable in the circumstances.

It is in the spirit of ensuring we are all doing our part to support the OPCW in its work – particularly in these difficult and unprecedented times – that I am pleased to announce New Zealand will be making an additional contribution of €100,000 to the Trust Fund for the new Centre for Chemistry and Technology. This brings New Zealand's total contribution to €200,000. We encourage States that are in a position to do so to also consider providing a contribution towards the Centre, which will allow the OPCW to enhance its international cooperation, detection capabilities, and response measures.

Finally, Mr Chair, we reiterate New Zealand's view that the Conference of the States Parties and Review Conferences should be open and inclusive events. New Zealand again regrets that, in addition to the difficulties of holding meetings in the context of a global pandemic, certain States Parties continue to block accreditation of particular NGOs, thus impeding consensus on the need to include all civil society applicants. We call on States Parties to be more inclusive and flexible, and recognise the important role civil society plays in global chemical weapons disarmament efforts.

This year has been difficult for all of us. Due to the pandemic, we have not made as much progress as we had wanted to in ridding the world of chemical weapons and holding those who use them to account. However, New Zealand recognises the important progress we have made and we remain steadfast in our commitment to upholding the Chemical Weapons Convention and the global disarmament framework. As States Parties to the Convention, our collective goal is to achieve a world without chemical weapons – and that day will come if we stand together, remain firm in our commitments, comply with our obligations, and support each other and the OPCW in our collective efforts towards that noble goal.

Thank you, Mr Chair.