



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

6 – 9 July 2021

Mr Chairperson,

Congratulations, Ambassador Abdelouahab Bellouki, on your appointment as the new Chairperson of the Executive Council. You can be assured of Aotearoa New Zealand's full support throughout your term. We thank Ambassador Agustin Vásquez Gómez for his steadfast leadership of the Council during a disruptive and difficult year for us all.

On 21 August, eight years will have passed since the world first saw the shocking images of Syrian civilians, including children, who were victims of a gruesome chemical weapons attack in Ghouta. Since 2013, through the work of the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) and later the OPCW's Investigation and Identification Team (IIT), the Syrian Arab Republic has been found to be responsible for eight cases of chemical weapons use in Syria.

The second report by the IIT, released on 12 April, marks the eighth case of Syrian chemical weapons use. The team concluded there are reasonable grounds to believe that on 4 February 2018, a military helicopter of the Syrian Arab Air Force under the control of the Tiger Forces hit eastern Saraqib by dropping at least one cylinder that released chlorine over a large area. This eighth case is yet another serious violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention by Syria and shows it failed to declare and destroy all of its chemical weapons.

In response, States Parties decided at the resumed session of the 25th Conference of the States Parties in April to suspend several of Syria's rights and privileges under the Convention. At the briefing on Syria on 30 June, we were disappointed to learn that Syria has not responded to the OPCW's requests to deploy the Declaration Assessment Team. We reiterate the Conference's demand for Syria to cooperate fully with the Technical Secretariat, declare its remaining stockpile, and join the rest of the world in our shared goal to rid the world of all chemical weapons.

Urgent questions also remain regarding the poisoning of Alexei Navalny with a nerve agent from the Novichok group of chemicals. The incident signals the alarming emergence of new and advanced chemical weapons. New Zealand continues to call on the Russian Federation to uphold its obligations under the Convention and investigate this chemical weapons attack that occurred on its soil. We also call on the Russian Federation to cooperate fully with the OPCW, including respecting the OPCW's independence and impartiality to conduct investigations and analysis.

We express our appreciation to Germany for its initiative to draft a decision that would allow the Executive Council to convene in extraordinary circumstances either at a venue other than at the seat of the Organisation or remotely using virtual meeting technology. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the critical need for such a decision. New Zealand supports Germany in its efforts and we look forward to the Council adopting the draft decision at its next session.

Thank you.