



National Statement by Australia

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

At the Ninety-Eighth Session of the Executive Council, 5-8 October

Mr Chair,

I would like to start by commending the Director General, Technical Secretariat and States Parties for their ongoing dedication to continuing the important work of the OPCW throughout the COVID 19 pandemic, both in the Technical Secretariat and the Policy Making Organs.

Mr Chair, we have before this Council the first biennial programme and budget for the OPCW. Australia appreciates the Technical Secretariat's efforts to deliver zero nominal growth budgets for many years. At the same time, we recognise the impact rising non-discretionary costs and inflation have on the budget.

Australia considers it important to ensure the OPCW has the funding necessary to carry out its core mandate. This is why we will support the proposed programme and budget for 2022-23. At the same time, we continue to call on the Technical Secretariat to look for cost efficiencies across its work.

Mr Chair, Australia remains deeply concerned that the Russian Federation has not provided outcomes of their investigations into the poisoning of Alexei Navalny. As we have said repeatedly, the poisoning cannot be left unexplained. Serious questions remain regarding how Mr Navalny came to be exposed to a dangerous nerve agent. We call on Russia to provide full details of the incident.

Mr Chair, Australia appreciates the Technical Secretariat's tireless efforts to resolve outstanding issues regarding Syria's chemical weapons programme. It is unacceptable that Syria has refused entry to a member of the Declarations Assessment Team (DAT). These visits are important if there is to be any prospect of Syria completing its initial declaration and coming back into compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention. We call on Syria to fully cooperate with the Technical Secretariat.

Mr Chair, Australia has been a strong and active supporter of efforts to continually review the OPCW's organisational governance and working practices to ensure the organisation remains in the strongest possible position to continue its vital work long into the future.

We encourage States Parties to continue to engage constructively in the Organisational Governance facilitation. The facilitation has provided rich and thoughtful discussion. There is still more work to be done, including in the area of diversity and geographic representation within the Technical Secretariat. Australia is optimistic that with the goodwill and commitment of States Parties, and the leadership of the Director General, we will be able to achieve some important outcomes in the course of the next year.

As we near the destruction of the last known chemical stockpiles, the OPCW will retain a crucial role in preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons. Australia would like to congratulate the Technical Secretariat on the ground-breaking of the new Centre for Chemistry and Technology. The Centre will represent an important element of the OPCW's work going forward and add vital capability to meet 21st century challenges. It is where experts from all regions will be able to gather to share knowledge, expertise and best practices on how to keep the world free of chemical weapons.

Mr Chair, the decision of this Council in March to adopt the decision entitled "Understanding Regarding the Aerosolised Use of Central Nervous System Acting Chemicals for Law Enforcement Purposes" represented a positive move forward to address an emerging risk. It was the result of years of consultation and engagement with States Parties that led to a strong and balanced decision.

The decision will be before States Parties for adoption at the Conference of States Parties in November this year. It is an example of how States Parties can look to the future to be ahead of new and emerging uses of chemicals for hostile purposes. We encourage delegations who are new to the issue, or those who still have questions, to please reach out to us and our co-sponsors ahead of the CSP to discuss the draft decision, and to join in supporting it.

Mr Chair, I would like to confirm Australia's support for the reappointment of Director General Fernando Arias. Director General Arias has proven he is a staunch defender of the Chemical Weapons Convention and the work of the OPCW. As the organisation moves into a post-destruction phase, Director General Arias will provide a steady set of hands and leadership to guide the OPCW into the future.

Thank you Mr Chair.