



OPCW

Executive Council

Ninety-Seventh Session
6 – 8 July 2021

EC-97/NAT.15
6 July 2021
ENGLISH only

AUSTRALIA

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR MATTHEW NEUHAUS
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF AUSTRALIA TO THE OPCW
AT THE NINETY-SEVENTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chair,

I would like to start by wishing you a warm welcome as Chair of this Executive Council. On behalf of Australia, I would like to assure you of our highest confidence in your leadership of the Council for the coming year.

Since the last Executive Council session, the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) has issued its second report, on 12 April 2021. This report concluded there were 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 dropped at least one cylinder containing chlorine on eastern Saraqib.

This is the second IIT report attributing chemical weapons use to the Syrian Arab Republic. These are chemical weapons the Syrian Arab Republic denies having. The report further strengthens the urgency of the Syrian Arab Republic completing a full, transparent, and accurate declaration of its chemical weapons programme, as required by EC-94/DEC.2.

Australia is disappointed to hear that the Syrian Arab Republic has not responded to recent requests by the Technical Secretariat to deploy OPCW personnel, including the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT), to the Syrian Arab Republic. These deployments are routine and are an important and valuable pillar of the Syrian Arab Republic's engagement with the OPCW.

In particular, it is through the DAT process that the Syrian Arab Republic has been able to resolve several outstanding issues regarding its chemical weapons programme. Australia would be deeply disappointed to see this cooperation end. We reiterate our call for the Syrian Arab Republic to engage in good faith to complete its initial chemical weapons declaration once and for all.

Australia would like to again draw the Council's attention to the poisoning of Alexei Navalny in Russia in August 2020. The poisoning cannot be left unexplained. Serious questions remain regarding how a person came to be exposed to a dangerous nerve agent. We call on the Russian Federation to work with the OPCW, including through a technical assistance visit (TAV).

Mr Chair, it has been my honour to continue, with Ambassador Dupuy of Uruguay, the important work of the organisational governance facilitation. This work has been made possible by the strong and constructive engagement shown by all States Parties, and the openness of the Technical Secretariat to work with States Parties to ensure that the OPCW is in the strongest



possible position to continue its vital work long into the future, including improved flexibility and enhanced dexterity. I look forward to our continued work, and to achieving some important outcomes in the course of this year.

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. It was the result of years of consultation and engagement with States Parties that led to a strong and balanced decision.

Australia and other co-sponsors look forward to the decision being adopted at the Twenty-Sixth Session of the Conference of the States Parties in November this year. 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 Conference to discuss the draft decision, and to join in supporting it.

Thank you.

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