



## **National Statement by Australia**

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

**Twenty-Sixth Session of the Conference of the States Parties, 29 November – 3 December 2021**

Mr Chair

I would like to start by commending the Director General, Technical Secretariat and all States Parties for their collective efforts during a difficult and testing time globally. Over the last year we have achieved some significant outcomes, notwithstanding the COVID-19 pandemic. We should feel proud of our collective achievements.

Mr Chair, at the Twenty-Fifth Conference of the States Parties in April, Australia was among a number of countries to co-sponsor a decision addressing the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic and its failure to comply with its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Australia was deeply disturbed following the release of two reports of the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team attributing the use of chemical weapons to the Syrian Arab Republic.

The use of chemical weapons by any country is unacceptable. States Parties have a responsibility to abide by the rules they have agreed to in signing up to the CWC. It is incumbent upon Syria to bring itself into compliance with the Convention without delay, and we encourage them to do so.

Syria must cooperate fully with the OPCW, in line with its obligations under United Nations Security Council Resolution 2118 (2013). Its ongoing delays and refusal to cooperate fully with the Technical Secretariat cannot continue. Syria has an obligation to resolve all of the outstanding issues regarding the initial declaration of its chemical weapons stockpile and programme. We have waited long enough.

Mr Chair, since August 2020, Australia has been calling on the Russian Federation to fully investigate and explain how Alexei Navalny came to be poisoned with a Novichok nerve agent. We still have not received a satisfactory response.

This is why Australia joined with others in submitting questions to the Russian Federation under Article IX (2) of the Chemical Weapons Convention. The Convention is clear about the obligations of States Parties. We all have an obligation to prevent chemical weapons incidents on our territory. This is a core tenet of the Convention.

There are many questions surrounding the poisoning of Mr Navalny and those questions cannot be left unanswered. Australia calls on Russia to engage in good faith and to respond directly to the questions submitted to it under Article IX. It is in the interests of all States Parties that any and all incidents of chemical weapons use are thoroughly investigated.

Mr Chair, Australia supports the 2022-23 Programme and Budget as proposed. The budget is fair and reasonable. It reflects the broad spectrum of the OPCW's work, but also the reality that rising non-discretionary costs and inflation impact the budget.

Australia considers it important to ensure the OPCW has the funding necessary to carry out its core mandate. I would like again to strongly urge all States Parties to pay their assessed contributions in full and in a timely manner.

Mr Chair, Australia would like to join with others in drawing attention to the importance of civil society participation in this Conference of the States Parties. NGOs play a key role in supporting the global fight against the use of chemical weapons. It is important that they be able to participate in this Conference, as provided for in the Guidelines adopted by the Conference of the States Parties at the Third Review Conference.

Mr Chair, I would like to confirm Australia's strong 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 courageous leadership to guide the OPCW into the future.

Mr Chair, I have had the honour over the past year to co-facilitate discussion on organisational governance issues. I would like to thank the Technical Secretariat and fellow States Parties for their active engagement in this process. Important issues have been raised and heard on the important tenure policy issue and the need to provide Director General Arias with support to ensure a strong and appropriately structured OPCW and culture of continuous improvement. I look forward to continuing to progress this important work with my co-facilitator Ambassador Laura Dupuy of Uruguay.

Mr Chair, I am pleased to report that this year an Australia laboratory achieved OPCW Designated Laboratory Status for the analysis of environmental samples. Australia became part of the OPCW network in 2016, when our Defence laboratory was designated by the OPCW for the analysis of biomedical samples.

Australia now has one of 15 laboratories in the world with OPCW Designated Laboratory Status for both biomedical and environmental sample analysis. As you know, in order to maintain designation, all OPCW network laboratories must adhere to strict administrative guidelines and annual proficiency testing. Australia will continue to work closely with the OPCW in strong support of these important requirements.

Mr Chair, I would like to congratulate the OPCW on the ground-breaking of its new Centre for Chemistry and Technology, to which Australia has donated. With destruction of the last declared chemical weapons stockpiles nearing completion, it is timely to look to the future and see how the OPCW can remain best placed to prevent the re-emergence of chemical weapons.

The Centre will represent an important element of the OPCW's work into the future and will add vital capability to meet 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges. In addition, we look forward to experts from all regions gathering to share knowledge, expertise and best practices on how to keep the world free of chemical weapons.

Mr Chair, Australia was proud to co-sponsor an Executive Council decision entitled “Understanding Regarding the Aerosolised Use of Central Nervous System-Acting Chemicals for Law Enforcement Purposes”, adopted at the March Council session. The decision is now before this Conference for action.

Australia has been a core advocate of this initiative for almost a decade, with Switzerland and the United States. We believe the use of certain toxic chemicals for law enforcement poses a real risk to the Convention, and to our collective safety and security.

The Convention places an obligation on States Parties to ensure that developments in the field of chemistry are not diverted for use as chemical weapons. We have put great weight on the advice of the OPCW Scientific Advisory Board that no chemical has currently been discovered or developed that satisfies the requirements of being able to produce incapacitating effects that can be safely used for law enforcement purposes.

After many years of discussion, debate and outreach, Australia believes the time has come to take action on this matter. I encourage all States Parties to join with Australia and our co-sponsors in supporting the decision.

Thank you, Mr Chair.