

Intervention EC-99

Agenda Item 7(e) – Addressing the threat from chemical weapons use Delivered by H.E. Matthew Neuhaus, Ambassador of Australia

Madam Chair,

I would like to deliver this statement on behalf of Canada, New Zealand, and my own country Australia, all of whom align themselves with the statement delivered by my distinguished colleague, the Ambassador of Germany.

Our three countries condemn in the strongest possible terms Russia's unjustifiable and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine. This is not just an attack on the sovereign state of Ukraine. This is an attack on international law, the UN charter and on the rules-based international order. The protection of civilians must be our highest priority, and we call upon Russia to withdraw its forces and allow for humanitarian responses. Russia must cease its aggression and return to good-faith diplomacy.

We wish to restate that the use of chemical weapons, under any circumstances, is prohibited under the Chemical Weapons Convention and that the Russian Federation is a State Party to the Convention, bound by its obligations. It is with this in mind that we refer to the Note Verbale of the Permanent Representation of Ukraine to the OPCW, dated 27 February 2022.

We are gravely concerned to hear reports that gas masks have been distributed to Russian forces in occupied eastern Ukraine, which raise the possibility that Russia might be looking to use chemical weapons, falsely claiming these were deployed by Ukraine. The use of chemical weapons, including as part of a false flag operation, is a blatant violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Sadly, the use of chemical weapons, accompanied by a campaign of disinformation, would be in keeping with recent behaviour by the Russian Federation. At the OPCW, Russia continues to deny involvement in the 2020 attempted assassination of Alexei Navalny, using a Novichok nerve agent. We are disappointed with Russia's lack of cooperation with the Technical Secretariat and also that no investigation into this attack has been carried out.

We call on the Russian Federation to take action to ensure accountability for chemical weapons use. And we call on Russia to respect and abide by international law, and of particular relevance to our discussions today, its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Thank you, Madam Chair