



**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR SUSANNAH GORDON PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF
NEW ZEALAND TO THE OPCW AT THE NINETY-NINTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

8 - 11 MARCH 2022

Madame Chair,

In our joint conviction to exclude completely the possibility of the use of chemical weapons, we meet this week to promote the effective implementation of, and compliance with, the Convention; to take measures in cases of non-compliance by a State Party; and to uphold and strengthen the OPCW framework to ensure that chemical weapons do not re-emerge.

Aotearoa New Zealand has witnessed this framework come under considerable pressure following a series of gross violations of the Convention. Since the start of the civil war in Syria, eight cases have been reported confirming chemical weapons use by the Syrian Arab Republic. We demand, again, that the Syrian Arab Republic immediately ceases all use of chemical weapons and complies fully with its obligations under the Convention. We will not allow Syria to escape full accountability for its repeated chemical weapons use, which has inflicted misery on untold numbers of innocent civilians.

Aotearoa New Zealand has also seen gross violations of the Convention through assassination attempts involving chemical weapons. This week marks four years since the ruthless poisoning of Sergei and Yulia Skripal in the United Kingdom, using a Novichok nerve agent. In 2020, a Novichok nerve agent was again used in the poisoning of Alexei Navalny in Russia. The use of chemical weapons in these assassination attempts is an affront to the global rules and norms that we collectively committed to uphold. We will not allow the perpetrators to escape accountability.

In light of the re-emergence of chemical weapons, Aotearoa New Zealand is very concerned about the possibility of the weaponisation of chemicals against the civilian population of Ukraine. Intelligence, shared by Ukraine ahead of this meeting of the Council, reports that in parts of Donetsk, gas masks are being distributed by occupiers to local militants and the Russian military. This is signalled by Ukraine as a precursor to a potential false-flag chemical weapon attack. Were it to occur, such an attack would not only be illegal, but morally reprehensible.

Aotearoa New Zealand condemns, unequivocally, the unprovoked and unjustified attack by Russia on Ukraine as a clear violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. This act of aggression is a grave breach of international rules; the use of force to change borders is strictly prohibited under international law. The harrowing and horrific images of the suffering in Ukraine speak volumes of this unfolding tragedy, and underlines the consequences of Russia's unprovoked aggression.

Aotearoa New Zealand calls on Russia to cease all military operations in Ukraine; to immediately and permanently withdraw to avoid further catastrophic and pointless loss of innocent life; and to cease its efforts to undermine the prohibitions and norms against chemical weapons use. The world is watching.

Thank you Madame Chair.