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AUSTRALIA

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR MATTHEW NEUHAUS
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF AUSTRALIA TO THE OPCW
AT THE 100TH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairperson,

I would like to commend the Director-General and the Technical Secretariat (the Secretariat) for their tireless efforts to progress the important work of the OPCW in these difficult times. The twenty-fifth anniversary of the entry-into-force of the Chemical Weapons Convention (the Convention) presents an important and timely opportunity to strengthen the global norm against illegal chemical weapons use.

Australia condemns in the strongest possible terms the Russian Federation's unprovoked and unjustified attack on Ukraine. Australia stands in staunch support of Ukraine and its people and urges the Russian Federation to cease its unilateral, illegal, and immoral aggression in Ukraine, which is a gross violation of international law, including the United Nations Charter. In this regard, Australia is pleased to have contributed AUD 200,000 to the OPCW Trust Fund for the Implementation of Article X (assistance and protection) of the Convention to support the OPCW's activities assisting Ukraine.

We deplore Russia's disinformation campaign aimed at sowing doubt and spreading false allegations of chemical weapons use in Ukraine. We are also deeply concerned about the Russian Federation's recent unjustified and unacceptable claims in its Note Verbale No. 29, dated 14 June 2022, which sought to undermine the credibility of the OPCW's Secretariat. We call on the Russian Federation to stop attacking the reputation of the OPCW. Australia strongly supports the OPCW's impartial and independent work to end the use of an entire category of weapons of mass destruction.

Australia remains deeply concerned by the poisoning of Alexei Navalny in 2020 using a chemical nerve agent from the novichok group. We call on the Russian Federation to provide a full account of the incident and to cooperate with the Secretariat.

Australia appreciates the Secretariat's efforts to resolve outstanding issues regarding the Syrian Arab Republic's chemical weapons programme. We call on the Syrian Arab Republic, as a State Party to the Convention, to fully cooperate with all parts of the OPCW, including the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT). The IIT was established in accordance with the rules and procedures of the OPCW. Australia has full confidence in the work of the OPCW in Syria and looks forward to the continuing regular updates from the Secretariat regarding its progress.



Mr Chairperson, I have had the honour over the past year to co-facilitate discussion on OPCW's organisational governance issues. Australia welcomes States Parties' constructive engagement in the process and the support from the Secretariat. The OPCW's objectives can only be achieved with the retention of expertise and the preservation of a skilled workforce. We would strongly encourage the OPCW to explore a more flexible tenure policy, having due regard to geographic and gender balance. We look forward to working closely with States Parties on these issues as part of the process during the Fifth Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties to Review the Operation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (Fifth Review Conference).

The Convention has become the most successful disarmament treaty to date, responsible for the verified destruction of 99% of declared chemical weapons stockpiles. However, its work will not end with the last known chemical stockpiles. In an increasingly complex strategic environment, the OPCW will play a vital role in preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons.

Australia would like to congratulate the Secretariat on progress on the cutting edge new Centre for Chemistry and Technology (ChemTech Centre), which will enhance the OPCW's capabilities and respond to twenty-first century challenges. Australia is pleased to have recently contributed an additional AUD 150,000 to support the OPCW ChemTech Centre.

Australia is continuing to support the implementation of the Convention in our region. As part of the OPCW Mentorship/Partnership Programme for National Authorities, we welcomed a delegation from Malaysia in March and held fruitful discussions between our national authorities on issues regarding implementation of the Convention, legislation, chemical safety, and security and regulating the import and export of scheduled chemicals. This included representatives from other government agencies and the Australian industry. A reciprocal visit will occur in August.

Mr Chairperson, I also highlight that this week the Australia Group (AG) meets in Paris to continue its important work. Australia has permanently chaired the AG since its establishment in 1985. As an informal group of 43 members (42 plus the EU), participants agree to harmonise export control legislation to reduce the risk of chemicals, biological toxins and dual use technologies being diverted to chemical and biological weapons programmes and the production of weapons of mass destruction. The AG has developed the 'AG Common Control Lists', to which all members agree to apply to export licensing measures and are reviewed regularly.

Australia looks forward to working cooperatively with all States Parties in the lead up to, and at, the Fifth Review Conference next year to achieve our common objective of a world free of chemical weapons. We applaud the work of the Open-Ended Working Group for the Preparation of the Fifth Review Conference and the progress they are making.

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