

Statement by New Zealand

27th Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention

Delivered by Minister Phil Twyford

Minister for Disarmament and Arms Control

Chair, Mr Director-General, and distinguished delegates,

It is an honour for me to deliver this statement on behalf of Aotearoa New Zealand in my capacity as Minister for Disarmament and Arms Control. This is a unique portfolio, which reflects my country's enduring commitment to disarmament and to achieving a world free of all weapons of mass destruction.

At the outset, please allow me to convey New Zealand's sincere gratitude to Director-General Arias and the OPCW Technical Secretariat for the integrity, competence and professionalism they continue to exhibit in the face of challenging circumstances. Please know that you enjoy the full confidence and support of New Zealand.

Chair, New Zealand remains steadfast in our opposition to chemical weapons, including their development, production, stockpiling, transfer and use – opposition shared by almost every country in the world.

It is a source of great pride that 193 states have joined the Chemical Weapons Convention, making it the most widely accepted disarmament treaty in the world. But we cannot be complacent. We will not be able to achieve our goal of the total elimination of chemical weapons until all countries have joined, and all stockpiles are declared and destroyed. We still have work to do.

It is a matter of regret that in recent years, among the community of states that have joined the treaty, we have witnessed gross violations of the Chemical Weapons Convention as well as other activities intended to undermine the work of the OPCW. New Zealand condemns these actions. We call on the OPCW membership to be united in its pursuit of accountability and justice against those who have used chemical weapons – there can be no impunity.

New Zealand urges the Syrian Arab Republic to declare and destroy the entirety of its chemical weapons programme following its proven use of such weapons, as established by extensive and impartial OPCW investigations. It is imperative that Syria complies with its treaty obligations and cooperates fully and in good faith with the Secretariat and other member states.

Chair, we are meeting together for the first time as the full Conference of States Parties since Russia's illegal and unjustified invasion of Ukraine. New Zealand reiterates our call on Russia to cease all military operations in Ukraine and immediately and permanently withdraw. We note our serious concern at Russian military attacks undertaken in the vicinity of civilian chemical facilities in Ukraine, and we denounce Russia's disinformation tactics, which consist of unsubstantiated allegations that Ukraine and others are using or preparing to use chemical agents in Ukraine. We unequivocally condemn Russia's conduct. We also request that the Secretariat continues to closely monitor the situation in Ukraine.

In the same vein, New Zealand is concerned that Russia has yet to respond credibly to questions from 45 States Parties submitted in October last year concerning the poisoning of Alexei Navalny with a Novichok nerve agent in 2020 on Russian soil. We urge Russia to remedy this lack of transparency and clarify what took place.

Notwithstanding these challenges, recognition is due for the laudable progress we have collectively achieved in a number of areas. New Zealand commends the Secretariat for its efforts in progressing the new Centre of Chemistry and Technology, and we look forward to its unveiling next year. It is an important resource that will provide for our future work in responding to threats and support capacity-building for member states.

We welcome the effort of Australia and Malaysia to host a Subregional Forum on National Implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention for Pacific Island States. As a member of the Pacific we value the opportunity to get together with our region and engage with and learn from each other. Regional initiatives are critical to ensuring that capacity-building is meaningful and actionable. We ask the Secretariat to continue its good work to ensure all States Parties have the support and resources they need to fulfil their treaty obligations.

Turning to the Review Conference of the Chemical Weapons Convention next year, I underline New Zealand's commitment to be a strong Pacific voice in defence of the OPCW's critical mandate to make the world safe from the threat of chemical warfare. Of course, preparations for the Review Conference are taking place against a difficult international security environment and at a time when international law and multilateral institutions are under threat. But rather than lowering or managing our expectations we must raise them – now more than ever we must pursue meaningful outcomes that safeguard and strengthen the Convention, and that bring us closer to its full implementation.

Finally, then, let me reiterate New Zealand's call on those states yet to accede to the Chemical Weapons Convention to do so at the earliest opportunity. We must strive for universalisation of this crucial treaty to bolster the international disarmament and non-proliferation framework and reinforce the global prohibition of all chemical weapons.

Thank you, Chair.