

AUSTRALIA
STATEMENT BY JULIE HECKSCHER
ACTING PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF AUSTRALIA TO THE OPCW
AT THE 102ND SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Mr Chairperson,

Australia remains committed to upholding a strong international rules-based order, in which disarmament and non-proliferation plays a critical role. Australia is a strong supporter of the *Chemical Weapons Convention* (“the Convention”) and its important role in eliminating an entire category of weapons of mass destruction. We would like to commend Director-General, H.E. Fernando Arias, and the Technical Secretariat for their tireless efforts in progressing the work of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in a challenging global environment.

A strong verification regime remains at the heart of the Convention and contributes to its successful implementation. It is essential for upholding international global norms against the use of chemical weapons. As the destruction of the last declared chemical weapons stockpiles nears completion, the OPCW needs to remain fit-for-purpose, with sufficient capabilities and expertise, to prevent the re-emergence of chemical weapons.

The Fifth Review Conference provides an opportunity to review our accomplishments under the Convention and shape the strategic direction of the OPCW for the next five years. Australia commends the OPCW and States Parties for their constructive engagement in the Open-Ended Working Group process, under the able leadership of the Estonian Ambassador, H.E. Lauri Kuusing. We strongly support Ambassador Kuusing’s work and his transparent and inclusive approach. We urge all States Parties to be flexible and creative so we can find a path forward.

As the WEOG regional coordinator, Australia has been working hard to engage with other countries across the organisation so we can understand the different perspectives and drive outcomes. We want to play a constructive role in ensuring that the Fifth Review Conference produces a positive outcome, and that the organisation continues to fulfil its mandate.

The work of the OPCW has been highly effective and critically important – building consensus against the use of chemical weapons and destroying nearly 99 per cent of the world’s declared stockpiles. Core to the OPCW’s work is its investigation and attribution functions. These elements play an important role in deterrence and preserving the global prohibition on chemical weapons.

Australia strongly supports the work of the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) and is gravely concerned that there are reasonable grounds to believe the Syrian Arab Air Force conducted a chemical weapon attack in Douma, Syria on 7 April 2018. Australia condemns these attacks in the strongest possible terms. We call on the Syrian Arab Republic to fully cooperate with the OPCW and comply with its obligations under the Convention.

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

Australia condemns in the strongest possible terms the Russian Federation’s unprovoked and unjustified attack on Ukraine, and its disinformation campaign. When countries act against the multilateral system – when they violate the United Nations Charter, act illegally or coercively, or

neglect its commitments – they undermine the very framework that forms our international community. We urge the Russian Federation to cease its unilateral, illegal, and immoral aggression in Ukraine and respect and abide by international law, including the Charter.

Australia looks forward to the inauguration of the OPCW's new Centre for Chemistry and Technology ("ChemTech Centre"). The ChemTec Centre will enable the OPCW to retain its capabilities, keep pace with developments in science and technology, and respond to new chemical weapons threats. Australia looks forward to engaging with the OPCW and States Parties to enhance capacity building. Australia remains committed to supporting Convention implementation in our region, including through the OPCW Partnership Programme with Malaysia and capacity building initiatives in the Pacific. We support strengthening capacity building in regions to ensure full implementation of the Convention for each State Party. Australia looks forward to further engaging with our neighbours in the Pacific region, to assist where we can.

Australia supports the allocation of sufficient resources for implementing the OPCW's mandate. A strong and appropriately structured OPCW will put the organisation on the best footing to meet the challenges of the future. Merit-based recruitment is a key attribute for the long-term needs of the OPCW. Australia also strongly supports diversity and inclusion efforts at the OPCW, including the promotion of gender equality and balanced geographical representation among the staff of the Technical Secretariat.

We strive to live in a world that is peaceful, predictable, and where sovereignty is respected. A world where the rules and norms are clear, mutually negotiated, and consistently followed. It is only through multilateral cooperation that we will be able to ensure global peace and security. It is not helpful when the core purpose of the Convention is undermined, or progress is blocked with technical objections and tactical disruptions. It is not helpful when reports are undermined of professionals within the organisation doing what they are tasked to do verifying chemical weapons use. Blocking progress through these actions is not in the interests of States Parties and runs contrary to the object and purpose of the Convention.

It is crucial that all States Parties support the work of the OPCW. We stand ready to assist the OPCW in its work to prevent chemical weapons use.

Mr Chairperson, I request that this statement be considered an official document of the 102nd Session of the Executive Council and published on the Organisation's external server and website.

Thank you.