

## **Fifth Review Conference of the Chemical Weapons Convention**

### **Australia's National Statement**

Chair,

Australia strongly supports the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). We are pleased to acknowledge the success of the Convention in its 26<sup>th</sup> year. The Convention's core foundation – to prohibit the development, production, stockpiling and use of chemical weapons – remains as important today, as it did when it was agreed many years ago.

Australia has an enduring commitment to a world that is stable and prosperous, operating by agreed rules, standards, and laws. In this, disarmament and non-proliferation play a critical role – and Australia has committed to increasing its efforts in this pursuit.

The CWC is one of the most successful disarmament treaties against weapons of mass destruction, backed by a strong support mechanism – the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). We join others in conveying our thanks to the OPCW for its ongoing work to operationalise the Convention's mandate and pass on our most sincere appreciation to Director-General Arias for his steadfast leadership over the past five years. We also wish to thank Ambassador Lauri Kuusing for his tireless efforts in supporting the Open-Ended Working Group Fifth Review Conference preparatory process. We also appreciate Ambassador Henk Cor van der Kwast's chairmanship of the Fifth Review Conference and assure you of our full cooperation and support. This Fifth Review Conference is a pivotal one. It is in this year, 2023, that the final remaining declared chemical weapon stockpiles are set to be destroyed. This accomplishment alone will demonstrate the power international cooperation can have in creating a safer and more peaceful world. The near universal adoption of the CWC demonstrates the commitment the international community has to a world without chemical weapons.

Work to implement and enforce the CWC will not end with the destruction of the last declared chemical stockpiles. As a matter of priority, this Review Conference must send a message to the world and set a path for the next five years to ensure that the Convention remains fit for purpose. In an increasingly complex strategic environment, the OPCW plays a vital role preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons.

Ultimately, implementation of the CWC by all nations is the best way to achieve this goal.

Australia is proud to have contributed to the success achieved by the OPCW and States Parties to the Convention since the last Review Conference. The OPCW has significantly progressed the CWC mandate through actions such as passing decisions on the scheduling of Novichock chemical agents and on the aerosolized use of CNS-acting chemicals.

Australia views the success of our partnership program with Malaysia as a model for supporting CWC implementation across the ASEAN countries. Australia will continue to explore joint program opportunities with our regional partners as reducing chemical weapons risk and advancing our regional security are issues important to our region. Our combined efforts are the best protective measure against non-State actors acquiring chemical weapons.

In October 2022, in partnership with Malaysia and the OPCW, Australia hosted a subregional forum on CWC Implementation for Pacific Island States in Brisbane. The forum provided an opportunity to exchange views on shared challenges and to support each other. A highlight was the keynote address by Director-General Arias calling out the tangible benefits of the CWC, especially in defence of the re-emergence of chemical weapons. It also provided an opportunity for the Director-General to hear directly from Pacific nations on their challenges implementing the CWC. These included developing expertise and training officers, and the clean-up of old chemical munitions remaining from World War 2. These insights provide an excellent foundation for further work in elevating Pacific voices in these important global discussions. We will collaborate with the OPCW and States Parties to deliver support tailored to the specific needs and environment of Pacific nations.

Australia would like to congratulate the Technical Secretariat on the opening of the new ChemTech Centre. We are proud to have contributed to this endeavour and would also like to commend all States who have provided their financial and political support to the construction and operation of the Centre. The ChemTech Centre will enhance the OPCW's capabilities to respond effectively to emerging challenges and reinforce the OPCW's verification capabilities. These measures will bolster the capacity of the OPCW in research, analysis, training, and capacity building; ensuring it maintains its long-held position as the global leader in the effort to rid the world of chemical weapons.

The Australian Defence Science and Technology Group (DSTG) laboratory has OPCW 'Designated Laboratory Status' for both biomedical and environmental sample analysis. The laboratory is one of sixteen laboratories in the world able to undertake both biomedical and environmental sample analysis on behalf of the OPCW. Australia is a strong and proud

supporter of the OPCW's mission to eliminate all chemical weapons and looks forward to continuing close collaboration with the OPCW and the Designated Laboratory Network. DSTG is currently working with Malaysian laboratories and the OPCW on a proposal for a twinning program to support increase in laboratory capability within our region.

As permanent Chair of the Australia Group, we are proud of our efforts supporting States to meet their CWC obligations by controlling exports of sensitive and dual-use items. Export controls are an enabler for peaceful uses of chemistry.

The Australia Group aims to ensure that the legitimate trade in sensitive dual-use goods and technology takes place with minimal disruption, while not contributing to the production of chemical or biological weapons. This is achieved through the harmonisation and coordination of export controls, information sharing and outreach. This provides exporting and importing countries and companies the ability to pursue their legitimate trade, confident that this trade is not assisting would-be proliferators. We welcome the use of the Australia Group Common Control List for chemical weapons precursors by States to support national export control measures.

Unfortunately, CWC challenges remain. Australia reiterates its condemnation of the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere, under any circumstances. There can be no impunity for those who use chemical weapons or those that attempt to hide chemical weapons programs. Without accountability, the Convention will not meet its mandate for a world free from chemical weapons. Australia is gravely concerned about the use of chemical weapons. We condemn, in the strongest of possible terms, the Syrian Arab Republic's repeated use of chemical weapons against its civilians. Violations of international law will not be tolerated, and we must call out all users of chemical weapons.

This is reliant on a strong attribution mechanism. We continue to support the recommendations by the Director-General to establish a broader attribution mechanism. We call on all States Parties to support the OPCW in these endeavours. Continued support for the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT), the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) and the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) is vital.

Australia joins our partners in condemning Russia's illegal and immoral, full-scale aggression against the people of Ukraine. The invasion is a gross violation of international law and Australia strongly supports Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. We remain concerned about the risk of chemical weapons use by Russia in Ukraine. We extend our

appreciation to the Technical Secretariat and States Parties for responding to Ukraine's requests for assistance and protection. Last year, Australia was pleased to contribute to the OPCW Trust Fund for the Implementation of Article X for the provision of assistance and protection to Ukraine in the event of the use or threat of use of chemical weapons.

A strong and appropriately structured OPCW will put the Organisation on the best footing to meet the challenges of the future. We commend the Technical Secretariat for taking practical steps to promote gender and geographic balance within the Organisation, and continuing to secure the highest standards of efficiency, competence, and integrity.

Australia would like to express our continued desire to work productively with the OPCW and States Parties. While we acknowledge the challenges ahead of us, it is evident from past successes that the international community can achieve exceptional outcomes when working cooperatively. We should build upon these past efforts to make the world a safer place for all.

I ask that this statement be made an official document of the Fifth Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties to Review the Operation of the Chemical Weapons Convention, and for it to be published on the OPCW external server and the public website.

Thank you, Chair.