

AUSTRALIA
STATEMENT BY DR GREGORY FRENCH
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF AUSTRALIA TO THE OPCW
AT THE 103RD SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Chairperson,

Australia commends the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemicals Weapons (OPCW) for the effective conduct of the Fifth Review Conference (RevCon). We particularly appreciate the commitment of Director General Arias and his team in the Technical Secretariat, as well as Ambassador Henk Cor van der Kwast for his sturdy and steady leadership as Chair of the RevCon. We applaud the transparent, inclusive and consultative manner in which the RevCon was conducted. This includes the comprehensive preparatory work of the Open-Ended Working Group under the direction of Ambassador Lauri Kuusing.

As Vice-Chair of the RevCon and WEOG Coordinator, Australia at all times worked with members across all regional groups to seek constructive approaches to fulfil the RevCon's mandate. We remain a steadfast supporter of the OPCW and Director General Arias. We also welcomed participation at the RevCon by our Pacific neighbours, Samoa, Fiji and Papua New Guinea. It is important to hear the Pacific voice resonate in The Hague. We look forward to further engagement in our region to promote Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) implementation and enhance chemical security. We invite Director General Arias to visit our region again and look forward to seeing OPCW officers as visitors.

Due to the collective good faith of most State Parties and under sound leadership, much was achieved in the lead up to, and during, the RevCon. Most of us entered the RevCon with the core objective of finding a meaningful consensus document that reflected the achievements of the past five years and set the future direction for CWC States Parties and the OPCW. But it is also clear there were a few who prioritised politics over the primary objective of ridding the world of chemical weapons.

We are especially disappointed that during the RevCon certain States Parties could not agree to include factual references in the draft outcomes report on vital OPCW investigation and attribution work. Thanks to the tireless and impartial work of the Technical Secretariat, the world knows the facts. In its third report, the OPCW's Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) attributed the chlorine attack on 7 April 2018 in Douma to the Syrian Arab Air Force. Douma is the ninth chemical weapons attack attributed to the Syrian Arab Republic since its declared program was destroyed.

We reaffirm the vital importance of attribution to deter future use. We support the Director General's call for the international community to take action. Australia is concerned that Syria has downgraded its cooperation with the OPCW. This situation is not acceptable. We expect Syria to discharge its obligations under the CWC, as we all are required to do. This month, Australia was pleased to provide an additional voluntary contribution of \$100,000 AUD to support the OPCW Trust Fund for Syria Missions in order to help advance the OPCW's Syria-related mandated activities.

Australia condemns Russia's illegal and immoral aggression against Ukraine and its people. The invasion is a gross violation of international law. We remain concerned about the risk of chemical weapons use by Russia in Ukraine. Australia stands with Ukraine and supports Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. We extend our appreciation to the Technical Secretariat and States Parties for responding to Ukraine's requests for assistance and protection under the CWC.

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

Australia is proud of our efforts as permanent Chair of the Australia Group to help participants implement provisions of the CWC by controlling exports of sensitive and dual-use items. The work of the Australia Group helps all States Parties to apply appropriate and effective export controls and thus to reduce chemical and biological weapons risks and to enable and sustain peaceful legitimate trade.

Representatives from the Australian Government were honoured to attend the opening ceremony of the new Centre for Chemistry and Technology. We are proud to have contributed funds to the Centre and will consistently support its activities - including state-of-the-art laboratory analysis, training and exercises, and importantly, as a focal point for international cooperation and capacity building.

Australia supports the allocation of sufficient resources for implementing the OPCW's mandate. A strong and appropriately structured OPCW puts the organisation on the best footing to meet the challenges of the future. Australia supports advancing discussions on the OPCW's tenure policy, having due regard to geographic and gender balance. Greater flexibility in the tenure policy will enable the Technical Secretariat to fulfil its mandate and retain the relevant capability, skills and expertise in order to respond to new and emerging threats. Australia also supports diversity and inclusion efforts at the OPCW, including the promotion of all forms of diversity among the staff of the Technical Secretariat. We commend the Technical Secretariat for taking practical steps to promote gender and geographical diversity within the organisation, while securing the highest standards of efficiency, competence, and integrity.

In addition, Australia supports greater civil society engagement and is keen to explore how we can promote broader participation on CWC issues.

Australia looks forward to, and will contribute to, a positive future agenda under the CWC. While a consensus outcome document was not achieved at the RevCon, there was a clear spirit of cooperation among most states to support the OPCW's work towards a world free of chemical weapons. We look forward to the Executive Council setting the stage for productive engagement and advancing this goal.

I ask that this statement be made an official document of the 103rd session of the Executive Council, and for it to be published on the OPCW external server and the public website.

Thank you, Chair.