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NEW ZEALAND

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR SUSANNAH GORDON
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE OPCW AT THE
FIFTH SPECIAL SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES
TO REVIEW THE OPERATION OF THE CHEMICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION**

Mr Chairperson,
Director-General,
Ministers,
Distinguished ambassadors and delegates,

Tēnā koutou katoa (greetings, hello to you all).

It is an honour to deliver this statement today on behalf of Aotearoa New Zealand to the Fifth Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties to Review the Operation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (Fifth Review Conference).

Let me first acknowledge you H.E. Ambassador Van der Kwast. Congratulations on your election as Chairperson of this important Review Conference. I assure you of Aotearoa New Zealand's full cooperation and support.

I would also like to acknowledge the excellent work of H.E. Ambassador Lauri Kuusing of Estonia in his capacity as Chairperson of the Open-Ended Working Group. We would not be at this point without him.

I would also like to acknowledge Director-General Fernando Arias, for your leadership of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). Under your able guidance, the Organisation is living up to its ideals. You continue to have Aotearoa New Zealand's full support in carrying out your mandate.

Distinguished Ministers, ambassadors and delegates, we are gathered here to answer a vital question: Is our Convention and our work in the OPCW doing what it needs to do?

This Convention took more than 20 years to negotiate. It is a hard-won prize, the world's first multilateral disarmament agreement to provide for the elimination of an entire category of weapons of mass destruction. Our Convention is a powerful tool in the pursuit of international peace and security.



After 25 years, we must soberly ask ourselves, ‘Has the Chemical Weapons Convention lived up to its potential?’ My answer is ‘Yes.’ There have been clear successes over the past five years.

All declared stockpiles of chemical weapons are scheduled to be destroyed later this year. This represents a huge achievement and hails a new era for the OPCW. We know there are still abandoned chemical weapons from World War II, but there is a plan to deal with those too.

The recent opening of the Centre for Chemistry and Technology (ChemTech Centre) is also a significant achievement that will support the full implementation of the Convention. The ChemTech Centre will help the OPCW maintain up-to-date verification technologies, thereby preserving the Organisation’s capacity to address current and future challenges. The centre will also support international cooperation and capacity-building initiatives. For Aotearoa New Zealand, we continue to stress that capacity building should be tailored to and prioritised in regions where it is most needed, including in our own Pacific region.

Ridding the world of chemical weapons is a collective endeavour, and we should work towards achieving it in an inclusive way. There are opportunities to sharpen the OPCW’s focus on diversity and inclusion, including through integration of a gender-responsive approach to all its activities.

We believe it is important that the Organisation has the right capability now, and in the future, to carry out its mandate. We support the Director-General’s work on this.

Aotearoa New Zealand also supports participation by non-governmental organisations in OPCW meetings. We need the expertise, perspective and experience of NGOs in the room as they help to ensure our work is robust and responds to the reality around us.

While we have seen successes, the OPCW has faced challenges in the last five years that we have not encountered in the preceding 20 years.

It is deeply regrettable that we must continue to state clearly and unequivocally that the use of chemical weapons is unacceptable. It is disappointing in the extreme that, in the five years since this Review Conference last met, we again have had cause to denounce instances of chemical weapons use in Syria, in the United Kingdom, and against Alexei Navalny who was poisoned with a novichok chemical nerve agent.

Aotearoa New Zealand will continue to condemn all uses of chemical weapons by anyone, at any time, under any circumstances, and seek accountability for those who use them. In this regard, Aotearoa New Zealand continues to condemn the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic. The use of chemical weapons was confirmed following extensive, thorough and impartial OPCW investigations. There is no disputing the evidence. Aotearoa New Zealand was pleased to make an extra-budgetary voluntary contribution this month as a tangible demonstration of our ongoing support for the OPCW’s work in Syria.

All instances of chemical weapon use represent a serious violation of the Convention. As Aotearoa New Zealand has done previously, we call on the Syrian Arab Republic to come into compliance with the Convention, to declare and destroy the entirety of its chemical weapons programme, and to cooperate fully and in good faith with the Secretariat and other States Parties.

Like all weapons of mass destruction, chemical weapons are inhumane. They have horrifying effects on victims, and often-disproportionate impact on women and children. We call on all States Parties to be united in pursuing accountability for the use of chemical weapons and justice for the victims of these heinous acts. We need to do this through actions, not just words.

Aotearoa New Zealand is also concerned about the impact of disinformation. We support efforts by the Secretariat, States Parties and others to counter disinformation and ensure the OPCW remains authoritative and trusted on the Convention and chemical weapons issues.

Along with other States Parties, we are pleased to join together this week to focus our collective efforts on reinforcing the norm against chemical weapons. In doing so, we recognise that the Convention's objectives can only begin to be fully attained once universality is achieved. Accordingly, we urge the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Egypt, and South Sudan to sign and ratify the Convention, and Israel to ratify it, without further delay.

As we have done for over a year, at every level and in many fora, Aotearoa New Zealand calls on Russia to cease all military operations in Ukraine, and to immediately and permanently withdraw. Russia must also cease its efforts to undermine the prohibitions and norms against chemical weapons use. We condemn unequivocally this invasion and continue to support Ukraine through a range of measures. We also call on all States Parties to redouble their commitment to the international rules-based order and disarmament. We are stronger together.

Mr Chairperson, I give you Aotearoa New Zealand's support once again and let me conclude with some words in our indigenous language, Te Reo Māori: Waiho i te toipoto, kaua i te toiroa, which means, "Let us keep close together, not wide apart". This speaks to the importance of keeping connected, of maintaining relationships and dialogue so that we can keep moving forward together.

We ask that this statement be issued as an official document of the Fifth Review Conference and for it to be published on the OPCW external server and the public website.

Nō reira, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā tatou katoa (thank you, that is all).

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