

**AUSTRALIA**  
**STATEMENT BY DR GREGORY FRENCH**  
**PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF AUSTRALIA TO THE OPCW**  
**AT THE 104<sup>th</sup> SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Chairperson,

Australia commends and supports the leadership of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemicals Weapons (OPCW) Director General Arias and the Technical Secretariat for its impartial and professional work in implementing the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). Australia also welcomes H.E. Lucian Fătu's leadership of the Executive Council and assures him of our full support in conducting the work of the 104<sup>th</sup> session.

Australia remains committed to upholding a strong international rules-based order. We remain a steadfast supporter of the OPCW and its critical work in achieving a world free of chemical weapons. This year, the international community achieved a major milestone with the OPCW verifying the destruction of the last declared chemical weapons stockpiles by all States Parties to the CWC. While this achievement is a testament to the OPCW and the multilateral system, the OPCW's work is far from complete. Further challenges remain, including recent uses and threats of use of toxic chemicals and new developments in science and technology.

To that end, Australia is pleased to support the new OPCW Centre for Chemistry and Technology to enhance the OPCW's capabilities to respond to these threats and challenges. We look forward to engaging constructively with States Parties in the Centre and exploring opportunities to enhance the Pacific voice in The Hague. We also look forward to strengthening engagement in our region to promote CWC implementation and enhance chemical security, including through the OPCW Partnership Programme with Malaysia and capacity building initiatives in the Pacific. Australia also looks forward to supporting and participating in the OPCW's first Table-Top Exercise on Chemical Terrorism this year.

Australia reaffirms the vital importance of attribution to deter future use. Australia condemns in the strongest possible terms the Syrian Arab Republic's repeated use of chemical weapons. We remain gravely concerned that there are reasonable grounds to believe that the Syrian Arab Air Force conducted a chemical weapon attack in Douma, Syria, on 7 April 2018. Syria must fully declare and destroy its chemical weapons program and allow the unfettered access of the Technical Secretariat to verify it has done so, in accordance with its CWC obligations. We applaud the impartial and independent work of the OPCW's Syria missions and strongly support the work of the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT). To this end we recently contributed an additional \$100,000 AUD to support the OPCW Trust Fund for Syria Missions.

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 deplores Russia's bombing of chemical production facilities in Ukraine and the disinformation campaign aimed at spreading false allegations of chemical weapons use. Reports of the repeated use of riot control agents by Russia are deeply concerning. Any use of chemical weapons by Russia would be a further grave violation of international law and an escalation in this conflict. We emphasise that under the CWC the use of riot

control agents for military purposes is prohibited. Any possible breaches of the CWC should be investigated and results captured in an OPCW report.

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.

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 address future challenges. We call on States Parties to meet their obligations and pay their assessed contributions in full and on time.

Australia supports advancing the actionable items discussed at the Fifth Review Conference, including on tenure policy, geographical diversity, gender equality, civil society participation and industry verification. Greater flexibility in the tenure policy will enable the Technical Secretariat to fulfil its mandate and retain the relevant skills and expertise to respond to new challenges. Australia supports diversity and inclusion efforts at the OPCW, while securing the highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity. We look forward to fruitful discussions on these issues, including through the new Working Group on Geographical Representation. We also look forward to furthering discussions on promoting greater civil society engagement on CWC issues and finding ways to advance industry issues.

Australia remains ready to assist the OPCW in its critical work to prevent chemical weapons use.

I ask that this statement be made an official document of the 104<sup>th</sup> session of the Executive Council, and for it to be published on the OPCW external server and the public website.

Thank you, Chairperson.