

AUSTRALIA
STATEMENT BY DR GREGORY FRENCH
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF AUSTRALIA TO THE OPCW
AT THE 28th SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES

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 supporting the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). Australia also welcomes H.E. Mr Suljuk Mustansar Tarar's leadership in chairing the 28th Conference of the States Parties and assures him of our full support in conducting the work of this session.

Australia has always pursued a world where differences and disputes are settled through institutions, agreed rules and norms, and not by power and size. 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 irreversible 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 responding to recent uses and threats of use of toxic chemicals and risks associated with rapid developments in science and technology.

To that end, Australia is pleased to support and have contributed to the new OPCW Centre for Chemistry and Technology, inaugurated in May this year. The Centre is already showing its great value in enhancing the OPCW's capabilities to respond to new threats and challenges. We look forward to furthering our engagement with States Parties in the Centre, including training opportunities for all States Parties.

Australia will remain focussed on working with the OPCW and partners to enhance the Pacific voice in The Hague. We 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. Collaboration, communication, and shared learning with our Pacific and Southeast Asian neighbours is integral to ensuring regional security.

The threat of terrorists using chemicals as weapons is a significant global challenge. Australia was delighted to support and participate in the OPCW's first Table-Top Exercise on Chemical Terrorism at the Centre last week. We were pleased to have the Australian Safeguards and Non-Proliferation Office co-facilitate the exercise and share our expertise. We thank all facilitators, presenters, and participants in the workshop for their valuable contributions in supporting the OPCW in its global anti-terrorism efforts.

Australia reaffirms the importance of attribution to deter future use. Australia condemns in the strongest possible terms the Syrian Arab Republic's repeated use of chemical weapons. After ten years, it is unacceptable that Syria's initial declaration still cannot be considered accurate or complete. We remain gravely concerned at the revelation in the third Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) report 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 cooperate with the OPCW and allow the unfettered access of the Technical Secretariat to verify it

has resolved the outstanding issues with Syria's initial declaration, in accordance with its CWC obligations. We applaud the impartial and independent work of the OPCW's Syria missions, the Declaration Assessment Team and the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT). To this end, in July this year, we contributed an additional \$100,000 AUD to support the OPCW Trust Fund for Syria Missions.

Australia is co-sponsoring the draft decision on Syria before this Conference to address the threat of chemical weapons use by Syria and non-state actors. We encourage all States Parties to support its adoption and uphold the integrity of the CWC.

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 its disinformation campaign aimed at spreading false allegations of chemical weapons use. Any use of chemical weapons by Russia would be a further grave violation of international law and an escalation in this conflict. Reports of the repeated use of riot control agents by Russia are deeply concerning. 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 again call on the Russian Federation to provide a full account of the incident and to cooperate with the Technical Secretariat.

As permanent Chair of the Australia Group, Australia is committed to helping participants implement provisions of the CWC by harmonising national export controls of sensitive and dual-use items. The work of the Australia Group helps all States Parties to apply appropriate and effective export controls to reduce the risk of inadvertently contributing to chemical and biological weapons proliferation and to enable and sustain peaceful legitimate trade. We welcome the use of the Australia Group Common Control List for chemical weapons precursors by States to support national export control measures.

Australia supports the allocation of sufficient resources for implementing the OPCW's mandate, and to deliver on the decisions and commitments of States Parties. A strong and appropriately structured OPCW puts the organisation on the best footing to address existing and 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 and the 104th Executive Council meeting, including on tenure policy, geographical diversity, gender equality, civil society participation and industry verification. We have had constructive discussions on these issues to-date. 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, and allow greater certainty to OPCW staff joining the organisation from further afield. We would like to thank co-facilitators Aotearoa New Zealand and Panama for their leadership in facilitating these discussions.

Australia continues to support diversity and inclusion efforts at the OPCW, while securing the highest standards of efficiency, competence, and integrity. We welcome the progress made by the OPCW to-date towards achieving gender equality and strengthening gender mainstreaming in the work of the Technical Secretariat, and urge all States Parties to support this process. We support the progress of the Working Group on Geographical Representation and thank Chile, as Chair, for its leadership on this important initiative to enhance geographical diversity.

Ridding the world of chemical weapons requires well-aligned and structured engagement between the OPCW, States Parties, and civil society. We thank Germany and Ecuador for leading discussions on enhancing engagement with civil society to promote the object and purpose of the Chemical Weapons Convention. To this end, Australia is also proud to co-sponsor and host a CSP side event this week, which is aimed at reinvigorating dialogue between the OPCW and its Member States and external stakeholders, including the scientific, academic, industry, and NGO communities. We thank all co-sponsors, co-organisers, and participants in this event.

Australia reaffirms its ongoing commitment to the OPCW and Director-General Arias in supporting our shared goal to have a world free of chemical weapons. We would like to express our continued desire to work productively with the OPCW and States Parties and we remain 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 28th session of the Conference of the States Parties, and for it to be published on the OPCW external server and the public website.

Thank you, Chairperson.