



NEW ZEALAND

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR SUSANNAH GORDON
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE OPCW
AT THE TWENTY-EIGHTH SESSION
OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES**

Mr Chairperson,
Director-General,
Distinguished delegates,

Tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa [greetings, greetings, greetings to you all].

Allow me to begin by congratulating H.E. Ambassador Suljuk Mustansar Tarar of Pakistan on his election as the Chairperson of this meeting. Ambassador, I can assure you of my delegation's full support.

Similarly, I wish to convey Aotearoa New Zealand's sincere appreciation for, and continued confidence in, Director-General Fernando Arias and the OPCW Technical Secretariat. We also acknowledge the valuable contributions of industry, academia and civil society in supporting and advancing our work here in the OPCW.

A core and enduring pillar of Aotearoa New Zealand's foreign policy is our unwavering opposition to the development, possession and use of weapons of mass destruction, including chemical weapons. We are resolute in our rejection and condemnation of chemical weapons. These indiscriminate and inhumane weapons must be permanently consigned to history.

I'd like to cover three points. First, the 'wins' we have banked this year. Second, the further progress we can achieve in this meeting. Finally, the work that is yet to be done.

In 2023, we welcomed two historic achievements.

In May, the OPCW officially opened the Centre for Chemistry and Technology, which brought with it a renewed prospect for advancing the full implementation of the Convention. It will preserve and augment the OPCW's capacity to address current and future challenges.

In July, we welcomed news of the complete destruction of the US chemical weapons stockpile. This marked the elimination of the entirety of the world's publicly declared chemical weapons.

Chair, we continue to support efforts to engage those four countries that remain outside of the Convention. In this vein, we warmly welcome updates from the Director-General on South Sudan's progress to accede to the Convention.

We also support the Organisation's efforts to strengthen international cooperation and capacity-building. This is why Aotearoa New Zealand was pleased to announce a voluntary contribution to the *Trust Fund for Regional Seminars* earlier this month to sponsor a legislative workshop in the Pacific Islands sub-region next year. Pacific countries are long-standing supporters of the international disarmament and non-proliferation framework, and of this Organisation specifically. As a nation in, and of, the Pacific, we are proud to support our region in developing robust CWC implementing legislation.

Let me turn to the work we can do now, collectively, in this session.

Chair, New Zealand is encouraged to see that the momentum of the Review Conference continues to move the Organisation forward.

It has been an honour to chair discussions on OPCW staff tenure policy, alongside H.E. Ambassador Elizabeth Ward Neiman of Panama. I would like to thank all delegations for their constructive cooperation. The draft decision signals a considerable improvement and we urge all delegations to support it.

Diversity and inclusion in the OPCW remain critical. We want to see an OPCW that reflects the range of countries that make up its membership. Aotearoa New Zealand is pleased to support the draft decision on geographical representation, and call on all States Parties to do the same. We would like to thank H.E. Ambassador Jaime Moscoso Valenzuela of Chile for his stewardship as Chair of the working group.

Ensuring gender balance within the Technical Secretariat and applying a gender-responsive lens to our work is also important to Aotearoa New Zealand. We commend the work the Secretariat has done to move gender equality forward, including the new *Roadmap on Workforce Gender Equality 2024–2026*.

Likewise, New Zealand welcomes initiatives to improve engagement with non-government organisations. This will support our work and ensure that the decisions we make as member states are robust and credible.

It is imperative that the OPCW continues to have the funding it needs to fulfil its mandate. For this reason, we urge all States Parties to support the *Draft Programme and Budget for 2024–2025* and to pay their assessed contributions, in full and on time.

While I would like to end my statement here, unfortunately, as previously, I need to turn to the use and threat of use of chemical weapons. There, our work is not yet done.

Aotearoa New Zealand continues to condemn the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic, the evidence of which is indisputable. As we have consistently done in this forum and elsewhere, we call on Syria to meet its legal obligations under the Convention, to declare and destroy the entirety of its chemical weapons programme, and to cooperate fully and in good faith with the OPCW and its membership.

Aotearoa New Zealand also condemns, unequivocally, Russia's unprovoked and unjustified attack on Ukraine. We remain concerned about allegations of the use of riot control agents as a weapon by Russia in Ukraine. Aotearoa New Zealand adds its voice to the call by many states for Russia to cease all military operations in Ukraine and to immediately and permanently withdraw.

In the same vein, Aotearoa New Zealand is deeply concerned that Russia has not yet responded to questions from 45 States Parties in October 2021 over the poisoning of Mr Alexei Navalny in 2020 with a nerve agent from the Novichok family. We, once again, urge Russia to cooperate in good faith.

In closing, let me leave you with a *Te Reo Māori* proverb which underlines the importance of *collective* effort to rid the world of chemical weapons: *he waka eke noa* [we are all in this canoe together, with no exception].

We ask that this statement be made an official-series document and published on the OPCW external server and public website.

Thank you.