

**AUSTRALIA**  
**STATEMENT BY DR GREGORY FRENCH**  
**PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF AUSTRALIA TO THE OPCW**  
**AT THE 105<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 supporting the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). Australia welcomes H.E. Mr Lucian Fătu's leadership in chairing the 105<sup>th</sup> Session of the Executive Council and assures him of our full support in conducting the work of this session.

Australia remains deeply committed to the OPCW's mission to achieve a world without chemical weapons. We know that we will always be better off in a world where rules and norms are clear, mutually negotiated and consistently followed. History teaches us that the alternative to what we have built here is conflict and chaos. The disarmament and arms control regimes that underpin our international rules-based order remain critical to preserving global peace.

As the WEOG regional coordinator, Australia has worked hard to engage with other regional groups to understand different perspectives and support the OPCW in fulfilling its mandate. With our term now ending, we would like to express our gratitude to colleagues for their support and look forward to continuing to work constructively with all regional groups to drive outcomes.

While the OPCW and the international community celebrated important milestones in 2023, including the verified and irreversible destruction of the last declared chemical weapons stockpiles, serious challenges remain. Now, more than ever, it is important that the OPCW is able to respond effectively to the uses and threats of use of toxic chemicals and adapt to an evolving threat landscape. Rapid developments in science and technology, including artificial intelligence and additive manufacturing, also have the potential to give rise to new and emerging threats, including the resurgence of chemical weapons.

For that reason, Australia was proud to support and contribute to the OPCW Centre for Chemistry and Technology. The OPCW ChemTech Centre will continue to enhance the OPCW's ability to respond to new threats and challenges. The ChemTech Centre provides an excellent platform for international cooperation and capacity building, and we look forward to working together with the Technical Secretariat and States Parties as we seek to strengthen the OPCW's work.

Supporting our Pacific family remains a key priority for Australia. We are keen to work with the OPCW and partners to lift the Pacific voice in The Hague and support capacity building initiatives in the region. Australia commends the OPCW for organising a Sub-Regional Workshop on Advancing CWC Implementing Legislation in Fiji in March, in partnership with New Zealand. The workshop builds on the Australia-Malaysia-OPCW co-hosted Sub-Regional Forum in Brisbane in 2022, and we look forward to contributing our expertise at the Forum. Australia values working with partners in our region to promote CWC implementation and enhancing chemical security, including our OPCW Partnership Programme with Malaysia.

The use of chemical weapons and toxic chemicals by terrorists and other non-state actors continues to pose serious threats to the implementation of the Convention. To that end, Australia was pleased to support the OPCW's first Table-Top Exercise on Chemical Terrorism in November 2023. With the support of the Australian Safeguards and Non-Proliferation Office, Australia was delighted to share its expertise as a co-facilitator of the Table-Top Exercise. We look forward to working with the Technical Secretariat and States Parties to continue enhancing the OPCW's global anti-terrorism efforts.

Despite our collective efforts to uphold the provisions of the Convention, recent history remains marked by the horrors of chemical weapons use. Australia once again expresses its strong condemnation of the Syrian Arab Republic's repeated use of chemical weapons. Over ten years after Syria's accession to the Convention, it is utterly unacceptable that its initial declaration cannot be considered accurate or complete. The findings of the third Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) report identifying reasonable grounds to believe that the Syrian Arab Air Force conducted a chemical weapons attack in Douma, Syria, on 7 April 2018, remain deeply concerning. We are also deeply concerned by the IIT's fourth report, released 22 February, which found that there are reasonable grounds to believe that ISIL perpetrated an attack using sulphur mustard in Marea, Syria, in September 2015. We condemn in the strongest possible terms the use of chemical weapons anywhere, at any time, by anyone under any circumstances.

Australia remains a steadfast supporter of the impartial and independent work carried out by the OPCW's Syria missions, the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT), and the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT). The IIT was established, in a manner fully consistent with the Convention, by a decision of the Conference of States Parties a little over 5 years ago to identify the perpetrators of specific instances of chemical weapons use. Australia also supported the decision on Syria at the Twenty-Eighth Conference of the States Parties to address the threat of chemical weapons use by Syria and non-state actors. We encourage States Parties to support its implementation and uphold the integrity of the Convention.

Australia joins the international community in condemning Russia for its unprovoked, unlawful, unwarranted, and unjustified act of aggression against Ukraine. Russia's actions represent a gross violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and international law. Australia deplores Russia's bombing of chemical production facilities in Ukraine and its disinformation campaign aimed at spreading false allegations of chemical weapons use. The risk of chemical weapons use by Russia in Ukraine remains deeply concerning, particularly in light of multiple reports of the repeated use of riot control agents by Russia as a method of warfare in Ukraine. Australia reiterates that the use of riot control agents on the battlefield is strictly prohibited by the Convention, and we call on Russia to comply with its obligations under the Convention. Any possible breaches of the Convention should be investigated and identified in an OPCW report.

We reaffirm our full support for Ukraine's independence and territorial integrity – bedrock principles of a rules-based world order. Every sovereign nation must be secure in its own borders and determine its own future. We value the support of the Technical Secretariat and States Parties in responding to Ukraine's requests for assistance and protection under the Convention.

Australia is shocked and saddened at news of Alexei Navalny's death. His heroic opposition to Putin's repressive and unjust regime inspired the world. We hold the Russian Government solely responsible for his mistreatment and death in prison. Russia needs to answer questions about the circumstances of his death. We also call on Russia to respond to questions from 45 States Parties that were raised under Article IX of the Convention in October 2021 in relation to the poisoning of Mr Navalny with a Novichok nerve agent.

Australia shares the deep sadness and grave concerns expressed by many today about the dreadful deaths and humanitarian crises caused by conflicts around the world, including the Hamas-Israel conflict. Australia supports the Technical Secretariat's role in monitoring the potential use of chemical weapons and commends its professional and impartial work in this regard. Where there is credible evidence of possible breaches of the Convention, the Technical Secretariat should act as mandated by the Convention and provide assistance to States Parties as required.

As permanent Chair of the Australia Group, Australia is committed to helping participants implement provisions of the Convention 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 advancing the actionable items from the Fifth Review Conference. We support the promotion of 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 towards achieving gender equality, and strengthening gender mainstreaming in the work of the Technical Secretariat. We also welcome the updates on the implementation of the Action Plan on Geographical Representation. Australia was pleased to support the decision in the Conference of the States Parties last year which allowed for greater tenure policy flexibility. This will enable the Technical Secretariat to retain relevant skills and expertise and respond to new and emerging challenges.

Australia supports enhancing engagement between the OPCW and external stakeholders, including the scientific, academic, industry and NGO communities, to promote the object and purpose of the Chemical Weapons Convention. We thank Germany and Ecuador for leading discussions on this important topic. Australia was proud to co-sponsor and host a side event in the margins of the Conference of the States Parties last year, alongside 17 other co-sponsors from all regional groups. The event was aimed at reinvigorating dialogue between the OPCW and its Member States and external stakeholders. We look forward to advancing the discussions.

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 stand ready to assist the OPCW in its critical work.

I ask that this statement be made an official document of the 105<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.