



NEW ZEALAND
STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR SUSANNAH GORDON
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE OPCW
AT THE 105th SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Chairperson,
Director-General,
Distinguished delegates,

Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa [greetings, greetings, greetings to you all].

Ambassador Fātu, New Zealand appreciates your continued leadership as Chairperson of the Executive Council. You can count on our full cooperation and support during this session.

We also wish to reiterate our confidence in Director-General Arias and the Technical Secretariat for continuing their work to implement the Convention with the utmost level of integrity, impartiality and professionalism.

Additionally, we acknowledge the crucial contributions of civil society, academia, the scientific community, and industry in improving the quality of our work here. We look forward to forging new opportunities to deepen external engagement in the year ahead.

Chair, we are meeting at a time of increasing global insecurity. New Zealand is gravely concerned by the deeply distressing humanitarian crisis in Gaza. We are also concerned about reports of a possible ground offensive into Rafah. New Zealand has consistently supported the United Nations General Assembly's calls for urgent humanitarian ceasefires. New Zealand will continue to advocate for a sustainable negotiated political solution to achieve lasting peace and security for Israelis and Palestinians.

Chemical weapons —an *entire class* of weapons of mass destruction— which were once consigned to the annals of history, now risk resurgence. This is the reality of today's international security environment. At the same time, we face unprecedented challenges as technologies such as AI and quantum computing change the way new weapons are developed. This is testing our legal frameworks.

Now is the time for us, as States Parties, to strengthen our collective resolve to uphold the norm against chemical weapons use —as the threat of resurgent use looms large, as ongoing conflicts risk encapsulating entire regions, and as the misuse of emerging technologies increase the potential for harm.

Chair, over the last decade the principles and norms of the chemical weapons prohibition regime, including the standing of the Organisation itself, have been challenged. We cannot stay silent while credible allegations of chemical weapons use remain unaddressed and perpetrators evade accountability.

New Zealand continues to call upon 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.

We are also gravely concerned by the use of chemical weapons by non-state actors in Syria. In its fourth report, released on 22 February 2024, the IIT found that there are reasonable grounds to believe that units of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) were the perpetrators of the chemical weapons attack on 1 September 2015 in Marea, Syria. We condemn this attack in the strongest possible terms and commend the IIT for continuing to fulfil its attribution mandate with impartiality.

Chair, we have seen little evidence, in this Organisation and beyond, that the Russian Federation is the bulwark of the international legal order it claims to be.

New Zealand *unequivocally* condemns Russia's illegal war of aggression in Ukraine and calls upon Russia to immediately and permanently withdraw from Ukraine. In this context, we remain deeply troubled by reports that Russian armed forces have repeatedly used riot control agents as a method of warfare in Ukraine.

Chair, we have all borne witness to the lengths that the Russian government is willing to go to silence its critics. New Zealand stands with others in expressing our sincere concern over Russia's repeated use of Novichok nerve agents: first, in 2018 against the Skripals, then again in 2020 against Alexei Navalny.

We were deeply saddened by Mr Navalny's death. We urge Russia to clarify the outstanding 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. Russia must provide a full account of the incident and cooperate with the Secretariat in good faith.

Chair, the use of chemical weapons by anyone, whether a State or non-State actor, anywhere, at any time and under any circumstances is a violation of international law. Chemical weapons are inhumane and add to the suffering experienced already during conflicts. In this regard, we welcome States Parties and the Secretariat monitoring relevant situations, including Ukraine and anywhere else, to be vigilant to uphold the norm against the use of these inhumane weapons. We expect that the OPCW will be ready to investigate any credible allegations of use of chemical weapons, should that be required.

Chair, it is against this backdrop the Secretariat and the States Parties continue to press ahead with positive, forward-thinking change.

On this note, we applaud the progress made by the Secretariat towards achieving universality. We remain positive about South Sudan's accession to the Convention and will continue to support efforts to engage the last remaining non-States Parties.

Ensuring that all States Parties already in the fold have the ability to implement national legislation that gives effect to their obligations under the Convention, remains a priority for New Zealand. This is why we are pleased to sponsor a legislative workshop in the Pacific Islands sub-region later this month. Pacific countries are long-standing supporters of the international disarmament and non-proliferation framework, and of this Organisation specifically.

Finally, Chair, we wish to express our gratitude to all States Parties and the Secretariat who made it possible to advance long-standing organisational governance issues. We are pleased to count tenure policy, geographical diversity, and gender mainstreaming among policy areas that are moving in a positive direction.

Chair, we find ourselves at a critical juncture in history. We have the capacity, together, to ensure that future generations inherit a safer world, free from the threat of chemical weapons.

Ngā mihi [thank you].

We kindly request that this statement be considered an official-series document of the 105th Session of the Executive Council and made available on Catalyst and the OPCW's public website.

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