



AUSTRALIA
STATEMENT BY DR GREGORY FRENCH
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF AUSTRALIA TO THE OPCW
AT THE 111TH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Chairperson,

Australia commends the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Director-General Arias and the Technical Secretariat for their leadership and professionalism in the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). We express our thanks and support for the Chairperson, H.E. Mr Thomas Schieb, in conducting the work of this session.

In 2026, the OPCW faces a series of critical tasks in its pursuit of a world free of chemical weapons. As a priority, ensuring the complete, verifiable, and irreversible destruction of all remaining chemical weapons stockpiles and facilities in Syria is fundamental to mitigating the very serious and real risk of chemical weapons proliferation. We encourage Syrian authorities and the Technical Secretariat to continue working constructively together, and with the support of all States Parties, in pursuit of this common goal. In this context, we also welcome productive discussions at this Executive Council session on the question of restoring Syria's rights and privileges in line with the decision of the Conference of States Parties taken in November 2025.

Australia reiterates its strong support for the ongoing efforts of the OPCW's Office of Special Missions (OSM) and its mandate to identify those responsible for the use of chemical weapons. We welcome the recent publication of the Investigation and Identification Team's (IIT) fifth report into instances of chemical weapons use in Syria, which for the first time involved the full cooperation of Syrian authorities in providing access and information. The report finds there are reasonable grounds to believe that the Syrian Arab Air Forces under Assad were responsible for the chemical weapons attack on Kafr Zeita in 2016.

The report is impartial, meticulous and comprehensive. It is a testament to the world-class technical and investigative expertise of the IIT, and we stress the importance of continuation of its work and investment in its capabilities. Most significantly, the report underlines the essential role of attributing responsibility for chemical weapons use in upholding the global prohibition against chemical weapons while also advancing a Syrian-led and internationally supported accountability processes to deliver justice for the victims and survivors of chemical weapons attacks.

Chair, we remain deeply troubled by the three Technical Assistance Visit (TAV) reports released by the OPCW confirming the presence of riot control agents (RCAs) in samples collected from the frontlines in Ukraine. These reports were prepared in line with the OPCW's strict protocols for investigation and sample analysis and raise serious concerns around compliance with Article I of the Convention, which strictly prohibits the use of any RCAs on the battlefield.

Australia reiterates its condemnation of Russia's unprovoked, illegal, and immoral invasion of Ukraine, and underscores its support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. We continue to call on Russia to cease its disinformation campaigns and fulfil its obligations under Article I and Article IX of the Convention.

A United Kingdom independent inquiry found President Putin of Russia responsible for the death of Dawn Sturgess by Novichok poisoning. Ms Sturgess was an innocent victim of Russia's egregious foreign interference for which Russia must be held to account. Australia is also deeply alarmed by



the conclusion of the United Kingdom, Sweden, France, Germany and the Netherlands that Alexei Navalny was poisoned in 2022 with a lethal toxin – epibatidine, which can be chemically synthesised – while held in a Russian prison. Russia’s failure to conduct independent investigations into the earlier attacks on Sergei and Julia Skripal and on Alexei Navalny with Novichok nerve agents is also deplorable. The Australian Government continues to hold Russia responsible for Alexei Navalny’s mistreatment and death, and calls on Russia to uphold the provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Australia remains concerned about the grave humanitarian crises caused by conflicts around the world. We welcome the Technical Secretariat’s role in monitoring the potential use of chemical weapons in different conflict situations. If credible evidence of CWC violations emerges anywhere the OPCW should act as mandated and assist States Parties as required.

Australia, as permanent Chair of the Australia Group, is committed to continue playing a constructive role in supporting effective implementation of the Convention. The AG Common Control Lists and Guidelines, which are publicly available and utilised far beyond the AG membership, strike the appropriate balance between countering the proliferation of chemical and biological weapons and enabling the confidence and assurance necessary to engage in legitimate trade for peaceful purposes.

Australia remains committed to supporting our partners in the Pacific to ensure a peaceful, stable, and prosperous region. We were pleased to co-host the OPCW’s *“Training Course on Preventing Illicit Transfers of Chemicals for Pacific Island Countries”* last year. This course strengthened the technical capacities of customs administrations in Pacific Island countries to detect, prevent and intercept illicit transfers and trade in chemicals including CWC-Scheduled chemicals.

Over the past 29 years, the OPCW has established itself as an extraordinarily successful disarmament organisation, including most recently under the leadership of Director-General Arias. You can count on Australia to continue to support the OPCW’s mission, as well as its efforts to promote gender equality, geographic representation, tenure flexibility, and civil society engagement.

As we confront today’s shared challenges, it is more important than ever that we defend the core principles of the Chemical Weapons Convention and continue to work – together – towards a world free from the fear of chemical weapons.

Thank you, Chair.