



**NEW ZEALAND STATEMENT  
BY H.E. AMBASSADOR CHARLOTTE FRATER  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE OPCW  
AT THE 111th SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Chairperson,  
Director-General,  
Distinguished delegates,

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

Thank you, Chairperson for your stewardship of this session. Director General Arias, Technical Secretariat, you have our full support.

I am honoured to address this forum for the first time in my capacity as New Zealand's Permanent Representative to the OPCW. New Zealand's commitment to the prohibition of chemical weapons remains unwavering, grounded in our long-standing support for a rules-based international order, robust verification mechanisms, and accountability for breaches of international law. Unfortunately, recent developments threaten these principles, making our shared work more important than ever.

Chair, we are deeply concerned by Russia's continued violations of the Chemical Weapons Convention. The independent inquiry into the death of Dawn Sturgess confirms what we have long known: Russian officials were deploying nerve agents on foreign soil as early as 2018, resulting in the death of a UK citizen. Alexei Navalny was poisoned with a similar nerve agent in 2020; years later he would die in Russian custody. Recent findings show Navalny was exposed to the lethal toxin epibatidine while imprisoned. We must be clear: the use of epibatidine as a weapon is within the scope and constitutes a violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention. We join other states to call on Russia to answer the many outstanding questions on the circumstances of Navalny's poisoning and death.

This pattern of Russia's violations is not new, however nowhere is its threat more acute than in Ukraine. With over 12,583 incidents of potential chemical weapons use, Ukraine is working tirelessly to respond. The Technical Secretariat has issued three reports confirming the presence of Riot Control Agents on the frontlines. Their use as a method of warfare is prohibited under Article I of the Convention. New Zealand has sanctioned officials linked to Russia's chemical weapons program; as States Parties we must continue responding to this mounting evidence.

Chair, New Zealand reiterates its support for the Office of Special Missions. We welcome the Technical Secretariat's most recent report, which found Syrian Air Forces under Assad were likely responsible for the chemical weapons attack on Kafr Zeita in 2016. This is the first time the Secretariat has released a report with full cooperation from the Syrian interim authorities.

Recent developments have showed us the challenges faced by the Secretariat and the Syrian interim authorities in investigating, verifying and destroying remaining chemical weapons from the Assad era. We commend their work, and as we see further progress, we welcome the opportunity to discuss the question of restoring Syria's rights and privileges.

Chair, this will likely be New Zealand's final national statement as a member of the Executive Council. As a member we found consensus across diverse views and delivered practical solutions that streamline the Secretariat's work. Our voluntary contributions have supported the OPCW's needs by strengthening security, compliance, and capacity building. As a Pacific nation, we value an inclusive forum that reflects the diversity of all States Parties. We have been proud to amplify the perspectives our neighbours - often smaller and geographically distant countries - and to support their meaningful participation in this important forum. As New Zealand concludes our time on the Executive Council, we congratulate all other outgoing States Parties, and welcome those that will join in May.

The Chemical Weapons Convention remains one of the most successful and robust instruments in the global disarmament architecture. It is a testament to what principled multilateralism can achieve, and it is important we continue to respond when it is challenged.

In closing, Chair, I share this whakataukī:

**"Toitū te whenua, whatungarongaro te tangata."**

The land endures, while people pass on. This proverb reminds us that while governments, representatives, and council members change, our shared responsibility to safeguard humanity from the scourge of chemical weapons must endure. The strength of the Chemical Weapons Convention will depend not only on our words, but on the actions we take, to preserve its integrity for those who come after us.

Ngā mihi nui. Thank you, Chair.