



NEW ZEALAND STATEMENT TO THE 20TH CONFERENCE OF STATES PARTIES TO THE CHEMICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION

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Thank you Mr Chair,

New Zealand joins others in congratulating you on your appointment as **Chair** of the 20th Conference of States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention. I can assure you of my delegation's full support and cooperation. I would also like to take this opportunity to express New Zealand's appreciation to the **outgoing Chair**, Ambassador Vesela Mrden Korac of Croatia. Thank you Vesela for guiding us so skilfully and patiently over the past 12 months. Thanks too to the Director-General for his leadership, and to the Technical Secretariat for its hard work throughout the year.

Mr Chair,

In April this year, we gathered in **Ypres** to mark the 100th anniversary of the first large-scale use of chemical weapons. In the words of UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon, "the only fitting tribute to the memory of those who died at Ypres, and to all victims of chemical warfare, is to rid the world of chemical weapons once and for all". This is the solemn undertaking to which all States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention have committed to achieve.

New Zealand is therefore dismayed that the OPCW's Fact Finding Mission (FFM), charged with establishing the facts surrounding allegations of the use of chemical weapons in **Syria**, has concluded with "the utmost confidence" that sulphur mustard was used as a

chemical weapon in **Marea** in August this year, resulting “very likely” in the death of a Syrian infant. New Zealand is also highly disturbed by the FFM’s conclusion that several incidents in **Idlib Province** between March and May “likely” involved the use of toxic chemicals – probably chlorine – as a weapon, resulting in the death of six to eight people.

I wish to underline New Zealand’s grave concern with these findings. Taken together with the earlier findings of the Fact Finding Mission, they show a blatant disregard both for Syria’s obligations as a State Party to the Chemical Weapons Convention, and for the lives of its citizens. As New Zealand has said repeatedly over the past year, the international response to these findings must match their seriousness, and those responsible must be held to account.

These disturbing developments also highlight the importance of the work of the **United Nations OPCW Joint Investigative Mechanism** which New Zealand fully supports.

Mr Chair,

On a more positive note, New Zealand warmly welcomes the two countries that have joined the OPCW since last year’s Conference of States Parties: Myanmar and Angola. Along with full compliance by all States Parties with the provisions of the Convention, **universality** is vital to achieve a total ban on chemical weapons. Every step closer to universality is a step towards a safer world.

New Zealand was also pleased to support the OPCW’s work over the past year by providing funding for the first **OPCW Assistance and Protection Training Course for Police First Responders** held in Kuala Lumpur in September. Practical activities of this kind make an important contribution towards our shared goal.

Mr Chair,

New Zealand also welcomes the work led by Australia and Switzerland on the **weaponisation of central nervous system-acting chemicals in law enforcement**, and is pleased to have co-sponsored the joint paper submitted to this Conference. We share the concerns expressed by numerous States Parties regarding the serious health and safety risks posed by such chemicals, and the possibility of their deliberate misuse.

The New Zealand Government is currently examining the issues carefully with a view to formulating a national position.

Mr Chair,

The OPCW stands at a crossroads as it nears the completion of its destruction activities. New Zealand looks forward to engaging in dialogue with all States Parties on the **future direction of the OPCW**. For our part, New Zealand envisages an organisation which: retains its core capabilities; is able to respond quickly and effectively to new substances and threats; supports national implementation; promotes regional cooperation; and leverages the knowledge, skills and capabilities of relevant stakeholders.

Finally Mr Chair,

In May next year New Zealand will complete its two-year **term on the Executive Council**. It has been a privilege to be able to play a full part in the decision-making apparatus of the OPCW. As mentioned before, regrettably the world is not yet free from the scourge of chemical weapons. New Zealand will therefore continue to work constructively with other States Parties, the Secretary General and the Technical Secretariat over the remainder of our term - and beyond - in pursuit of the Convention's goal of a safer and chemical weapons free world.

I ask that this statement be treated as an official document of this Conference.

Thank you for your attention.