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**AUSTRALIA**

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR DR BRETT MASON  
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TWENTY-FIRST SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES**

Mr Chairperson,

May I join my colleagues in congratulating you on your election as Chairperson of this Session of the Conference. Australia wishes you well– as I assume all delegations do– and we pledge our support as you guide us towards a successful outcome.

This morning our Director-General said our Organisation, the OPCW, is a remarkable body. He described this Organisation as an “extraordinary international endeavour”. Of course, the Director-General is right.

We are fortunate to be served by him, supported by a dedicated and professional Technical Secretariat, and a body of States Parties which, despite our differences, strives for consensus. Despite these differences, we have made for a better world. A world, if not completely free, but then much freer from the spectre of chemical weapons. I like to hope, ladies and gentlemen, that we are all optimists. I like to believe that I am, but whether or not we are, we must be realists.

Let us be honest, we are faced with the most serious violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention in its history. We now know from the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (the JIM) that chemical weapons have been used by both Syrian Government forces and Da’esh. In addition, the Declaration Assessment Team’s report shows us that there continues to be serious gaps and inconsistencies in Syria’s declaration under the Chemical Weapons Convention. As a member of this assembly, I am acutely aware that States Parties are often criticised for being “political” and delegations are subject to criticism for “politicising” the Syria debate. However in our view, it is not political to demand that measures be taken against those who are proven to have used chemical weapons. It is not political to demand that the Syrian Government provide satisfactory explanations for the outstanding gaps and inconsistencies in its declarations. It is not political to send a strong collective signal to all governments and non-State actors that the development and use of chemical weapons will not be tolerated.

However, it is political to turn a blind eye to these violations. It is political when States Parties decide not to act and not to protect and not to enforce the Convention. That is political. That is politics.



It is the primary legal obligation of the Executive Council to enforce the Convention against those who would breach it and to hold those States accountable.

Australia therefore welcomes the Council's recent decision to condemn the use of chemical weapons in Syria and establish further verification measures. Syria's flagrant and repeated violation of its basic obligations under our Convention cannot be met with silence or excuses by this Session of the Conference.

All of us look forward to the day when our world is free of chemical weapons, but we must also look beyond that horizon, to the task of preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons. We have much work to do. We must enable the Technical Secretariat to keep up with scientific developments. We must continue to heed the impartial and independent advice of the Scientific Advisory Board. We must ensure the OPCW's verification measures are robust, without creating unnecessary burdens on industry or National Authorities. We must make the best use of the Advisory Board on Education and Outreach to promote the objectives of the Convention and share best practice in chemical security. We must prevent terrorist groups and other non-State actors from acquiring the means to carry out chemical attacks. We must keep striving for universal membership of our Convention, and also the universal implementation of all its obligations on States Parties. We must work together to remove blind spots in the Convention.

In this regard, Australia and over 30 other States Parties have signed a joint paper for this Conference, on the use of Central Nervous System-Acting Chemicals for Law Enforcement Purposes. This Paper acknowledges the serious risk of death or permanent injury from the dispersal of these toxic chemicals in an aerosol form. It calls for a start to discussions on this important subject. We invite all States Parties to join this paper as co-signatories.

Also, whilst I have the floor, may I take this opportunity to invite all of you to our side-event, scheduled to take place at lunchtime tomorrow, which we will co-host with Switzerland.

Over the last three years, we have heard from almost every State Party represented here today that the use of toxic chemicals as a weapon-anywhere and by anyone and under any circumstances-is reprehensible and completely contrary to the provisions of the Convention and all norms of international law.

Such a statement is unimpeachable, we all agree with it. However, we must have the courage to carry out our conviction, to uphold this principle. For without commitment, our aspiration is just empty rhetoric, pushed aside by politics and pushed aside by convenience.

We owe each other, our world and our future, more than that.

I thank you.

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