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AUSTRALIA

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSAOR DR BRETT MASON
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF AUSTRALIA TO THE OPCW AT THE
TWENTY-SECOND SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES**

Mr Chairperson,

May I join colleagues in congratulating you on your election as Chairperson of this Conference of the States Parties. Australia wishes you all the very best.

May I also acknowledge our Director-General, H.E. Ambassador Ahmet Üzümcü, who was a very welcome visitor to Australia in July as we marked the twentieth anniversary of the Convention and the OPCW.

This is the Director-General's last Conference of the States Parties. And I cannot quite work out if I detect a smile on his face – or a look of sadness. But can I thank the Director-General, and I know my colleagues would join me, for all he has done to fight the scourge of chemical weapons. Few can claim that they have made the world a safer place. H.E. Ambassador Üzümcü can make this claim. And, colleagues, he can verify it!

Colleagues, let me ask you a question. Have we, since we all met here a year ago, have we made the world a safer place? Safer from the scourge of chemical weapons? Safer from weapons of mass destruction? Safer from rogue States and non-State actors seeking to wreak fear and terror? Is our world safer? This is our benchmark.

Mr Chairperson,

Amid the discussions, the debate and sometimes disagreement, we should never forget what we have achieved, together.

It is easy, sometimes too easy, to fall prey to pessimism and to despair. But when a State Party succeeds in destroying an entire category of weapons of mass destruction, that is cause for congratulations.

We congratulate the Russian Federation, and now Libya also, on completing their chemical weapons destruction programmes. And we acknowledge the generous contributions by donors, partners and technical experts to support and verify this significant Convention milestone. For all the debate about non-proliferation and use of chemical weapons, we can be glad that, at least in this respect, our world is a safer place.



We welcome also the example shown this month by leaders at the East Asia Summit, who condemned chemical weapons attacks in the Syrian Arab Republic, including the use of nerve agent sarin in April 2017, and recognised the need to speak with one voice against the use of chemical weapons.

Also in our region, Australia will host the OPCW's first Analytical Skills Development Course in the Southern Hemisphere. Chemists from the Indo-Pacific will be trained in the analysis of chemical warfare agents.

And, in our twentieth anniversary year, the OPCW came together on the appointment of our next Director-General, the most accomplished H.E. Ambassador Fernando Arias. And we stood as one against chemical terrorism. And progress was made in addressing the growing threat of non-State actors. All this in a spirit of good will and consensus. In these ways colleagues, we are working for a safer world.

Mr Chairperson,

We are entering a period of transition. With destruction of chemical stockpiles near complete we must remain vigilant not to accept the re-emergence of chemical weapons in any guise.

As colleagues will be aware, Australia, Switzerland and dozens of other States Parties remain concerned by the use of central nervous system acting chemicals in aerosol form used for law enforcement purposes. Momentum for formal discussions about these chemicals has been growing since our First Review Conference in 2003.

At lunch time today we held a very well attended – standing room only – side event on this important OPCW future priority. Delegates heard from the Chairperson of the OPCW Scientific Advisory Board and an official of the United States Drug Enforcement Administration.

We believe the world will be a safer place when these toxic chemicals are acknowledged and addressed by the OPCW.

But, Mr Chairperson, how safe can we be, when we have failed to universally condemn a proven user of chemical weapons?

Colleagues, there is no more important issue, no more vital test for our Organisation, than how we deal with a State Party that uses chemical weapons. This is our primary obligation. And this is our first such test. We will all be judged by our response to this challenge.

Why then are members of our Organisation aligning themselves with the political objectives of a proven user of chemical weapons? Why are States Parties putting bilateral interests above multilateral obligations and universal norms?

We all agree there must be zero tolerance for chemical weapons. And yet, we tolerate the Syrian Arab Republic's incomplete declarations; we seem to tolerate the Syrian Arab Republic's proven use of chemical weapons. The Syrian Arab Republic continues to drag out, drip-feed and dissemble while using chemical weapons on at least four occasions.

As the guarantor of the world's commitment not to use chemical weapons, the OPCW (that is us) must lead the universal condemnation of a proven user of chemical weapons. We cannot

be passive in the face of the use of weapons of mass destruction. If we allow the norm against the use of chemical weapons to be eroded, we also risk eroding the norm against the use of other weapons of mass destruction.

Our failure as an organisation to universally condemn the Syrian Arab Republic has made for a more dangerous world.

The first task of the Executive Council when it next meets must be to take action on the Syrian Arab Republic in response to the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism's thorough and professional report.

Mr Chairperson,

A principal role of our Organisation, a very reason why it was established, was to deploy its technical expertise in the cause of non-proliferation. To question the objectivity, impartiality, or capacity of the OPCW and its investigative arms is not only to prejudice the fight against chemical weapons, but also to call into question the vital architecture of non-proliferation.

Yet some States Parties have sought to cast doubt on the integrity and expertise of our Fact-Finding Missions and the Joint Investigative Mechanism because the findings of fact do not serve their political interests. Of course, the JIM also found that the terrorist group ISIL used chemical weapons. Are we now saying that that too is in doubt? We think there is no doubt.

How is it in anyone's interests, any man, woman or child, if the credibility of our Organisation and its investigative organs are undermined. Any undermining of the OPCW and its investigative arms will make for a less safe world. We will all be more vulnerable.

Mr Chairperson,

Our disappointment, frustration and outrage at events in the Syrian Arab Republic tests our resolve as it exhausts our vocabulary. And yet, we know the world has no alternative except to denounce the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere and under any circumstances. Our common outrage must never grow tired, nor must we ever accept the unacceptable. We must shake ourselves free of any complacency. We must not be worn down by inaction, obfuscation or a haze of misinformation. This is what the perpetrators and their protectors want.

We will be safer when we take a united stand against anyone who uses chemical weapons; when we take a united stand to defend the integrity of our Organisation; and when we summon energy and never tire of the fight against chemical weapons.

Failure at any step – and our world is less safe.

Mr Chairperson, colleagues – I thank you.

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