



Statement by Australia
HE The Hon Brett Mason
Permanent Representative of Australia to the OPCW
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Mr Chairman, Director-General, colleagues,

The Chemical Weapons Convention is the world's most successful disarmament treaty and the OPCW, our organisation, is the world's most successful disarmament body. They are key pillars in global non-proliferation. They make for a safer world.

But the use of chemical weapons on three continents in less than three years demands that we do yet more to end their use.

This Special Conference has been called to strengthen our organisation and to reaffirm our common cause against those who would use chemical weapons.

We are here, all of us, to give meaning to our oft-cited refrain, that we oppose the use of chemical weapons by anyone, at any time, under any circumstances.

Mr Chairman, in 1993 the world came together and agreed that the Chemical Weapons Convention would frame how we would respond to the use of chemical weapons.

Our collective challenge is to follow and enforce the rules we set ourselves, and that includes identifying those who violate the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Now, some argue that if the OPCW were to identify, to attribute responsibility for the use of chemical weapons, that the unity, the harmony, the good will and the consensus of our organisation would suffer.

Colleagues, we cannot allow this argument to prevail. Are we really committed to prohibiting chemical weapons, or only committed if no one is upset, only committed if no one complains, only committed if no one is put out? That cannot possibly be the goal of our organisation – a body committed to disarmament.

The consensus that truly matters is our collective resolve to prohibit chemical weapons. That is what brings us together today. To sacrifice that consensus is a betrayal of the political will that created our Convention.

All of us oppose the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere and at any time. But without attributing responsibility for their use, our words become empty rhetoric.

Without attribution, without holding nations and non-state actors to account, our world will be less safe. When we are not prepared to identify those who use chemical weapons and when responsibility cannot be attributed, those that use chemical weapons will more confidently wear a cloak of impunity. It is our job to lift that cloak, no matter who seeks to wear it.

What is the point of a disarmament and non-proliferation regime without the will to act and without the will and the means to identify those who violate it? How can the world confidently disarm when we cannot attribute responsibility for chemical weapons use?

Mr Chairman, Australia supports the establishment as soon as possible, of independent, impartial, expert arrangements under the Chemical Weapons Convention to attribute responsibility for chemical weapons attacks in Syria.

The OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) found the Syrian Armed Forces and ISIL responsible for multiple chemical weapons attacks. And we are disappointed at the repeated use of the veto in the UN Security Council to end the JIM and prevent the establishment of a full replacement.

But the Chemical Weapons Convention clearly provides for this organisation to identify those who use chemical weapons. Attribution is clearly part of the OPCW's remit. It is, after all, a technical exercise. Facts must be established and analysed. This technical work, this commitment to science, is at the core of the OPCW's mandate, responsibility and expertise.

This Conference is tasked with promoting the object and purpose of the Convention by strengthening its implementation, including compliance. That must extend to attribution.

Mr Chairman, Australia rejects the view that attributing responsibility to the users of chemical weapons will politicise the OPCW. To uphold the Convention is not political. To prohibit chemical weapons is not political. To attribute responsibility for the use of chemical weapons is not a political act. It is clearly a technical one. Attribution is a matter of science.

What is political is the denial of facts, the rejection of expertise and the undermining of our organisation and our Convention.

To question the objectivity, impartiality, integrity or capacity of the OPCW is not only to prejudice the fight against chemical weapons, but also to call into question the vital architecture of non-proliferation. The international community is justified in its trust of the Director-General and this Organisation.

Colleagues, I do not know how often I have heard echoing in our conversations, discussions and deliberations, and today as well, the refrain that 'We oppose the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere at any time'. We earnestly repeat it, we believe it, yet chemical weapons use continues.

If we are not to succumb to hollow ritual, we must give meaning to our beliefs.

Our promise to the world, the promise of the OPCW to the world, was to prohibit chemical weapons.

Our mission is now to hold and complete this vow.

Our purpose today is to take strength from our collective belief that the future and fate of our organisation should not be beholden to the vagaries of vetoes nor to the politics of power. For no national interest outweighs the benefit of ensuring a world free of chemical weapons.

Those who use chemical weapons must be identified. They must not succeed in hiding or in finding refuge in the failure of our resolve.

Mr Chairman, colleagues, I thank you.