



AUSTRALIA
STATEMENT BY DR GREGORY FRENCH
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF AUSTRALIA TO THE OPCW
AT THE 108TH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Chairperson,

Australia commends the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Director-General Arias and the Technical Secretariat for their leadership and their continued professionalism, integrity, and impartiality in supporting the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). We express our full support for the Chairperson of the 108th Session of the Executive Council, H.E. Mr Andrés Terán Perral, in conducting the work of this session.

Australia strives for a world where we can find collective solutions to our toughest problems. That is why we place so much value in the OPCW, one of the most successful disarmament organisations in the world. Australia remains unwavering in its commitment to the CWC as one of the core pillars of the global disarmament and non-proliferation regimes. We will always work to uphold the mutually agreed rules and norms that underpin the international system to promote stability, peace, and prosperity.

Australia remains committed to supporting our Pacific partners and ensuring a peaceful, safe, and resilient Pacific region, including in the context of the CWC. For this reason, Australia was proud to co-sponsor a statement by countries in the Pacific region at CSP-29, which reiterated our longstanding commitment to the CWC and its role in maintaining international peace and security in our region. We will continue to work with the OPCW and partners to ensure that Pacific countries are heard in the multilateral institutions in The Hague. We will continue to explore ways to support and build on the OPCW's highly-valued Pacific capacity-building initiatives. This includes the 2024 Regional Customs Conference held in Vanuatu and the Workshop on Advancing CWC Implementing Legislation held in Fiji. We continue to support ways to strengthen CWC implementation and enhance chemical security in the Indo-Pacific region, including through our OPCW Partnership Programme with Malaysia, including the ongoing laboratory twinning program.

In the context of an ever-evolving threat landscape, the OPCW and States Parties must remain prepared to respond to the use and threats of use of toxic chemicals by State and non-State actors. Australia commends the OPCW's efforts in this regard, including its work to stay abreast of rapid advancements in science and technology, including Artificial Intelligence (AI), additive manufacturing, and quantum technologies. In partnership with our MIKTA colleagues, Australia hosted a side event on AI in the margins of CSP-29, bringing together experts from MIKTA countries to highlight the opportunities and challenges for the CWC. The role of science education and outreach is also vital in supporting the OPCW's mandate. In this context, Australia commends the work of the Scientific Advisory Board and the Advisory Board on Education and Outreach (ABEO) and the appointment of its new members, including Professor Kellie Tuck from Australia.

Australia will continue to work with States Parties and Australia Group participants in our capacity as permanent Chair of the Australia Group. The Group celebrates its 40th anniversary in 2025, helping to ensure effective CWC implementation through the harmonisation of national export controls of sensitive and dual-use items. This important work enables States Parties to apply appropriate national export controls to reduce the risk of inadvertently contributing to the proliferation of chemical and biological weapons and enable peaceful legitimate trade. The control lists are a public good – many non-participant countries use them in their national systems.

Following years of obstruction and obfuscation by the former Syrian government, and the consequent risk of undeclared chemical weapons, precursor materials and production facilities, we welcome the signals of cooperation from the Syrian authorities and their support for the central tenets of the CWC.



Australia welcomes Director-General Arias' visit to Damascus in February and commends him for his comprehensive briefing on his meetings with the Syrian authorities. We look forward to supporting and working with the Technical Secretariat and its Syria Missions – the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM), the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT), and the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) – in close cooperation with the Syrian authorities – to seize this concrete opportunity to bring us closer to our shared goal of a world free of chemical weapons. Australia thanks Qatar for its important role in representing Syria in the OPCW, as well as the Netherlands for providing security for DG Arias' visit to Damascus. The fall of the Assad regime does not end the fight against impunity. Australia reiterates its strong conviction – as reflected in the OPCW Ieper Declaration – that perpetrators of chemical weapons attacks should be held accountable. It is incumbent on us as States Parties to ensure that the horrors and devastation the Syrian people endured as a result of chemical weapons use never happen again. In this context, the OPCW's Syria Missions continue to deliver high-quality, impartial, and timely work that has strengthened the OPCW in its pursuit of a world free of chemical weapons. We commend the IIT – which was established in 2018 in a manner completely consistent with the OPCW's mandate and the CWC – for its reports on chemical weapons use by both the former Syrian government and non-State actors, including ISIL. Here, too, we look forward to supporting the Technical Secretariat in its cooperation with the Syrian authorities, and all States Parties, to enable accountability and justice to prevail – for the sake of the victims and their loved ones – and for the sake of us all.

Australia reiterates its strong condemnation of Russia's unprovoked, illegal and immoral invasion of Ukraine, which entered its fourth-year last month. We reiterate our support for Ukraine's sovereignty and integrity. We remain deeply concerned by credible reports of Russia's repeated use of riot control agents and scheduled chemical substances as a method of warfare in Ukraine, which is strictly prohibited under the CWC. We reiterate our call on Russia to comply with its CWC obligations, cease its targeted chemical weapons disinformation campaigns, and respond to requests submitted under Article IX, paragraph 3, of the CWC to clarify deeply disturbing reports of its use of prohibited chemical agents. CWC breaches should be investigated and documented in an OPCW report. In a time of unprecedented challenges, we will continue to call for Russia to fulfil its Article IX obligations and end its disinformation campaigns.

Australia is deeply disturbed by the findings of the TAV reports released on 18 November 2024 and 14 February 2025, which confirmed the presence of riot control agents in samples collected from the frontlines of Ukraine. This analysis was carried out in a manner consistent with OPCW's stringent procedures. Australia commends the OPCW's expert and impartial investigation and sample analysis. The OPCW's work serves as a reminder that not all heroes wear capes: some wear hazmat suits, collect and process samples, and thereby help to make the world safer – whether in a laboratory or out in the field.

Last month marked one year since the death of Alexei Navalny in a Russian prison. The Australian Government holds Russia solely responsible for Mr Navalny's mistreatment and death and condemns Russia's failure to conduct a credible investigation. Navalny's death does not absolve Russia of its responsibility to credibly investigate his earlier poisoning with a Novichok nerve agent.

In the context of the grave humanitarian crises caused by ongoing global conflicts, including Gaza, Sudan and Ukraine, Australia shares the serious concerns expressed by many States Parties. We welcome the Technical Secretariat's role in monitoring the potential use of chemical weapons in different conflict situations. If credible evidence of CWC violations emerges, anywhere, the OPCW should act as mandated and assist States Parties as required.

Australia reiterates its support for the OPCW and States Parties' efforts to promote diversity and inclusion at the OPCW whilst maintaining the highest possible standards of efficiency, integrity, and competence. This includes our joint efforts to promote gender equality, geographic representation, civil society engagement, and CWC universality. We support the Decision on Amendment of the OPCW



Tenure Policy to Allow Rehiring on an Exceptional Basis and thank New Zealand and Mexico for their work. The decision provides the OPCW with the flexibility and expertise it needs to address significant challenges, while preserving the non-career nature of this organisation.

Australia is committed to our goal of a world free of chemical weapons. We will work with all States Parties to uphold the CWC and ensure that the scourge of chemical weapons is forever consigned to the history books.

Thank you, Chairperson.