



**NEW ZEALAND STATEMENT
BY H.E. AMBASSADOR SUSANNAH GORDON
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE OPCW
AT THE 108th SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Chairperson,
Director-General,
Distinguished delegates,

Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa [greetings, greetings, greetings to you all].

Ambassador Parral, New Zealand thanks you for your leadership as Chairperson. Director General Arias, you have New Zealand's continued support; we thank you for your guidance during your tenure.

Chair, as we address you today, we are looking out at a different landscape than we imagined at the November Conference of States Parties. Fast moving developments in Syria surprised the international community but present an opportunity to resolve a file which has remained open for more than a decade. We thank the Director General for his reporting on the Technical Secretariat's recent visit to Damascus. We must act quickly to verify, contain, and destroy any remaining chemical weapons and facilities if these are found. We are looking forward to a new era of cooperation between Syria and the OPCW, and will provide an opportunity for peace, stability, and justice for all citizens of Syria.

In addition to a focus on Syria, we remain deeply concerned about ongoing chemical weapons use in Russia's war in Ukraine, which the OPCW has now established beyond doubt is occurring. Despite Russian false counternarratives and unfounded accusations, a clear picture is emerging that Russia is directly and deliberately breaching the Convention in the manner in how it is waging war on Ukraine.

We continue to note with concern reports alleging canisters containing chemicals being deployed in Myanmar, and reports of missiles containing toxic gas being used in Sudan. We cannot turn a blind eye to the human suffering that the use of these weapons would cause. Nor should we, as ignoring such use runs the risk of sliding back to a world where chemical weapons are normalised. We ask the Technical Secretariat remain vigilant about any allegations of chemical weapon use, wherever these occur and by whomever.

Chair, it is our job as States Parties to empower the Technical Secretariat to deliver on this responsibility. We need a Technical Secretariat that is resourced to do the job we have asked of it. This means supporting the OPCW in its budget, both through assessed

contributions and where possible, via additional voluntary support. We also need to give the Director-General and the Technical Secretariat flexibility to employ the best personnel with the expertise needed for the job at hand. New Zealand was honoured to work with Mexico to facilitate some small changes in this regard, and we count on the Council's support for them.

New Zealanders, like all of us, want to live in a world free of chemical weapons. To achieve this, we welcome the voices of smaller states, of women, of countries less represented or regions geographically distant from The Hague. We welcomed the engagement of many Pacific neighbours at the last Conference of States Parties and look forward to supporting our region's work in the year ahead. We recognise the expertise of academics, industry and civil society, particularly as new challenges emerge. These perspectives help build a rich, diverse organisation with resilience and durability. Let us strive to continue our shared work in the year ahead.

Chair, let me finish with an indigenous proverb: *He rau ringa e oti ai* – this is to say, many hands make light work. The challenges ahead loom large, but they are not impossible when we work together.

Ngā mihi [thank you].