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AUSTRALIA

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR DR BRETT MASON
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF AUSTRALIA TO THE OPCW
AT THE EIGHTY-FIRST SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Thank you, Mr Chairperson,

Our work here at the OPCW is committed to the prohibition of chemical weapons. It is indeed one of the great success stories of multilateral diplomacy – a notoriously slow-moving and ponderous arm of statecraft, subject to the high thresholds of consensus and low ambitions of some States Parties.

And yet, despite these challenges and the vagaries of national and regional interests, almost all governments across the world have joined together to pursue the just goal of a world free of chemical weapons.

Two and a half years ago, our Executive Council met here in The Hague, as did the United Nations Security Council in New York. They did so to address the tragedy of chemical weapons being used against the people of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Much came from these meetings:

The Syrian Government's accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention.

The Syrian Arab Republic's commitment to fully declare its chemical weapons programme.

And the Syrian Arab Republic's undertaking to dismantle its programme completely.

However, Mr Chairperson,

Two and half years later, this body has witnessed evidence of the continuing and systematic use of toxic chemicals against the people of the Syrian Arab Republic; evidence that points to the responsibility of the Syrian Government for many of these attacks. Australia supports the ongoing work of the OPCW-UN- Joint Investigative Mechanism to identify the perpetrators.

We still see major gaps and inconsistencies in the Syrian Arab Republic's declaration. And in the Declaration Assessment Team's latest report, we read in its conclusion that further progress is not possible for no less than nine of the 17 outstanding questions.



We have seen the good work of the Technical Secretariat and others to destroy the Syrian Arab Republic's declared chemical weapons programme. And I congratulate them on their achievements. But until we are sure that the Syrian Arab Republic has declared everything, there is no telling what more needs to be done.

Australia calls on the Syrian Arab Republic to address the legitimate concerns of the international community, immediately and comprehensively. If it will not, the Executive Council must respond accordingly. We therefore call on all members of the Executive Council to support the draft decision on the declaration and related submissions by the Syrian Arab Republic.

Australia remains deeply concerned too about the risk of Libya's remaining chemical weapon precursors falling into the hands of terrorists.

We acknowledge the intense efforts of the Technical Secretariat, Libya and others to address this threat. And I applaud all parties involved and their search for a timely, effective and permanent solution.

Australia welcomes progress made on the issue of declarations of discrete organic chemicals. We believe that still further consultations are needed to ensure we strike a proper balance between the verification goals of the Chemical Weapons Convention, prioritisation of OPCW resources, and appropriate burdens on industry.

The threat of non-State actors gaining access to chemical weapons is real. The OPCW has a substantial contribution to make to counter-terrorism efforts – through its leadership on chemical security, its education and outreach programme, and of course the Open-Ended Working Group on Terrorism and its sub-working group on non-State actors.

To meet these and other future challenges, the OPCW must prepare today for the realities of tomorrow. We support the establishment of an open-ended working group on the future priorities of the Organisation, and we look forward to participating.

It is our job to ensure that the OPCW has the skills and resources to address new and emerging technologies which can undermine the object and the purpose of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

One current threat to the Convention is the potential use of central nervous system-acting chemicals for law enforcement purposes. Australia's views on this subject, I think, are well known.

We acknowledge the good work of the Scientific Advisory Board, in April 2011 and October 2012, to consider scientific aspects of central nervous system-acting chemicals – then referred to as 'incapacitants'. Importantly, these reports acknowledged that the term 'non-lethal' was misleading and inappropriate when talking about these chemicals.

The Board recognised, Mr Chairperson, the near-impossible task of controlling the dosage of these toxic chemicals when they are dispersed en masse.

We would support the Scientific Advisory Board revisiting its previous work, as was suggested by some delegations during last year's Conference of the States Parties.

This would assist in reminding the current Board members and States Parties of the scientific consensus surrounding central nervous system-acting chemicals, and allow new enquiries to be discussed and analysed.

At the Twentieth Conference of the States Parties, Australia was pleased to join with 22 other States Parties in co-authoring a paper on central nervous system-acting chemicals. We intend to submit the paper again to this year's Conference, and we urge all States Parties to join as co-signatories and support its proposal for further discussions within the OPCW.

Mr Chairperson, I thank you.

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