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AUSTRALIA

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

Madam Chair,

Before I begin, may I join my colleagues and sincerely congratulate you on your election as Chair of this Council. Australia is delighted to be taking up Executive Council membership this meeting, and you can count on our support as you steer this Council toward considered, just, and fair outcomes.

It was almost three years ago that the OPCW was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for, and I quote, “its extensive efforts to eliminate chemical weapons”. And the prize was richly deserved.

As the Chairman of the Nobel Prize Committee observed on that day, the obligations of the Chemical Weapons Convention on States Parties are unimpeachable, and unimpeachably fair. In his words: “All countries must eliminate their chemical weapons. All nations are treated equally”.

He went on to say that peace is brought about not only by idealists. The world also needs practical politicians and responsible institutions, capable of moving us away from confrontation.

We, the OPCW, are that “responsible institution” and it is our challenge to arrive at just and fair decisions that remove the inhumanity of chemical weapons from human conflict.

We have before us several draft decisions which seek to do just that.

One proposal calls upon Executive Council members to acknowledge the report of the Director-General on his recent consultations with Syrian authorities, the professional and objective findings of the Declaration Assessment Team, and the lack of progress made by Syria to address the gaps and inconsistencies in its Chemical Weapons Convention declaration.

These gaps and inconsistencies can only lead the world to doubt that Syria is complying with the Convention.

Australia’s view is that from the moment Syria was effectively compelled by the international community to join the Convention, the Syrian Government has shown little inclination to fulfil its treaty obligations—either by renouncing the use of toxic chemicals as a means of war making, or by making a full and accurate declaration.



Of course, the Director-General's report is damning. Not only does it conclude that many of Syria's claims are not even scientifically or technically plausible, but the "number of outstanding issues have actually increased steadily over time". It is getting worse—not better!

Another draft decision calls on us to find effective collective responses to the horrifying new trend of non-State actors producing and using chemical weapons.

This threat is real—and it real for all of us.

To meet it, nations have no choice but to implement all provisions of the Convention, strengthen cooperation on chemical security, and improve legal measures to prevent and respond to chemical terrorism.

As colleagues are acutely aware, the fundamental purpose of the Executive Council is to safeguard the integrity of the Chemical Weapons Convention. It is, indeed, our duty. Australia urges all Council members to support both draft decisions.

All of us gathered here today must also remain vigilant to make sure that developments in science and technology do not undermine the Convention's goal of non-proliferation.

To quote once again from the Chairman of the Nobel Prize Committee, "Development does not stop. We suspect the emergence of new forms of warfare, new types of chemical weapons, types which the world has not seen up to now and which are potentially dreadful in their consequences".

Australia looks forward to discussions on future priorities of the OPCW, and we stand ready to make positive contributions to the working group.

But we do not need to wait for tomorrow to discover new developments in chemistry with potentially dreadful consequences. They are with us today. Right now.

Australia—together with Switzerland and an ever-growing number of States Parties—has real and serious concerns about the use of aerosolised central nervous system-acting chemicals for law enforcement purposes.

Some of these chemicals are as lethal as sarin and VX, and when dispersed through the air it is virtually impossible to control the dosage received by any individual.

Australia and many other nations have called for discussions about central nervous system-acting chemicals within the OPCW, including through a joint paper for last year's session of the Conference of the States Parties. We intend to re-submit the paper to this year's Conference, and I urge States Parties to join as co-signatories.

The OPCW deservedly won the Nobel Peace Prize for its "efforts to eliminate chemical weapons". Our efforts have been successful. But the responsibility given to the OPCW is akin to the heavy boulder which, in Greek antiquity, Sisyphus must forever push up the mountain.

Our vigilance and our strength must remain, as our task is never done.

And nor, Madam Chair, is our task easy. As our Director-General said during his Nobel Prize

acceptance speech, “it often means governments showing the political courage to take tough decisions for the benefit of the community of nations”.

Colleagues, we are at a critical moment right now. We must have the courage to make the tough—yet just and fair—decisions that are required of all of us.

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