



**AUSTRALIA**

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

Thank you Mr Chairperson, my colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

Last time I had the pleasure of addressing this Council, I commenced in the spirit of optimism – and I would like to do so again.

This year, as we mark the 20th Anniversary of our Convention, our community can rightly celebrate a major milestone in the achievement of our goal towards a world free of chemical weapons.

Australia joins our Director-General in congratulating the Russian Federation on the complete, verified destruction of its declared chemical weapons stockpile in September.

This is a significant achievement, the Director-General said a “remarkable achievement”, shared by the entire OPCW community. For success – we required the commitment of the Russian Federation and the dedication of its experts to dispose of 40,000 metric tonnes of declared chemical weapons we required the cooperation and support of many international partners in this room, and we required the expertise and professionalism of OPCW staff to verify the result.

All were necessary to achieve this timely and significant milestone – the commitment, cooperation and technical expertise of OPCW staff and States Parties – for none on their own could have secured this success.

Let us not forget that the leadership of the OPCW was a crucial factor at every stage.

Australia also welcomes the United States of America’s ongoing efforts to reduce its own stockpile. The United States of America’s approach in Kentucky signals its commitment to comply fully with its obligations under the Convention and to work closely with the local community and environmental standards.

But even with the advanced destruction of existing stockpiles, our work is assuredly not done. The successful destruction of Russian and United States of America’s chemical weapons is based on verified and verifiable chemical stockpiles. But we have learned, through hard experience, that credible destruction requires credible declaration.



Mr Chairperson, if you indulge me, as a Russian proverb wisely reminds us – “Da-ve-ryai, no, pra-ve-ryai” – which means “Trust, but, verify”.

No matter how gifted or great the technical expertise, no matter how dedicated the staff, no matter how generous the international partners – unless the declarations of States Parties are accurate and made in good faith – the complete destruction of chemical weapons is impossible.

We are all witness to the Syrian Arab Republic’s failure to declare fully and honestly its chemical weapons programme. Verification has become a deadly game of “hide and seek”.

Our Organisation is being drip-fed information by the Syrian Arab Republic to delay accountability and cloud culpability. We sit here, strung along – time and time again – as we attempt somehow to divine the truth of the Syrian Arab Republic’s latest declaration. This drip-feeding of information and staged cooperation over months and now years shows not only a lack of good faith, but a wilful disregard for our Organisation and our Convention.

Our task becomes so much the harder, if not impossible. No amount of our expertise will make up for declarations that are inconsistent, vague, misleading, ambiguous or incomplete declaration.

Colleagues, nothing can compensate for – nothing can make up for – a lack of good faith.

May I congratulate you, sir, on your able stewardship and sensitivity in building consensus for the appointment of our next Director-General. The job was not easy.

Of course, Australia endorses and salutes the excellent candidate, recommended from a strong field. But I also want to congratulate my colleagues. The good spirit, cooperation and consensus building I witnessed was an example of multilateralism at its best.

Our next Director-General has the vital task of bringing us together to further strengthen the OPCW.

The serious doubts about the completeness of the Syrian Arab Republic’s declaration, and the confirmed use of chemical weapons by the Syrian Government, remains the greatest immediate challenge to our Organisation.

But we are entering also a period of transition – with destruction activities near complete – when we must determine our future priorities.

As my colleagues eloquently point out, we must remain vigilant not to accept the re-emergence of chemical weapons in any guise, at any time, in any place, by any State or non-State actor, Mr Chairperson.

As colleagues will be aware, Australia, Switzerland and dozens of other States Parties remain concerned by the use of central nervous system-acting chemicals in aerosol form for law enforcement purposes. We continue to seek further support from States Parties and a commencement of discussions.

But I can only hope, Mr Chairperson, that these future challenges we face do not curb the charm and enthusiasm for which Ambassador Arias is so rightly famous.

Mr Chairperson, colleagues, I thank you.

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