



OPCW

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AUSTRALIA

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR DR BRETT MASON
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF AUSTRALIA TO THE OPCW
AT THE FIFTY-FOURTH MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Madam Chairperson, colleagues,

Yet again we have gathered to discuss the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic.

Yet again, there are deaths of men, women and children.

Yet again, allegations that death was unleashed from the sky.

Yet again, we task this Organisation's Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) to investigate chemical weapons use.

Yet again, we will reconvene to examine the FFM report.

And, then, yet again, we will task the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) with determining the perpetrators of this crime.

Colleagues, we have seen this sad, but necessary timetable all too often. The people of the Syrian Arab Republic certainly have.

Australia shares the outrage of this Council at the chemical weapons attack in Idlib Province on the morning of 4 April. What civilised nation wouldn't be outraged? More than 80 people asphyxiated by toxic chemicals delivered from the sky. Outrage at the slaughter of innocents, outrage at the callous flouting of the Chemical Weapons Convention and, outrage at the commission of a war crime. Use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere, anytime, is illegal and abhorrent. It debases our common humanity.

The international community is demanding action as bomb by bomb, gas strike by gas strike, the world's most successful disarmament convention is undermined. So too our Council and our Organisation.

So, Australia fully supports the action taken by the United States of America on 7 April. The action was a proportionate and calibrated response designed to prevent and deter the further use of chemical weapons.



Australia condemns, Madam Chairperson, the repeated exercise of vetoes in the United Nations Security Council to delay and block international action in relation to the Syrian Arab Republic.

We support a thorough, a transparent, and an expeditious investigation to determine the full scope of the incident. The existing, independent, expert FFM and JIM are best placed to undertake this vital work.

The investigating teams must receive the full support and the cooperation of all parties, including secure access to all sites the missions deem necessary. However, the withholding of such access, as has happened in the past, must not be used to undermine its conclusions.

Some States Parties have sought to cast doubt on the objectivity and impartiality of the operation of the FFM and JIM; bodies both endorsed by this Executive Council. And, the JIM unanimously supported by the United Nations Security Council on three occasions.

A principal role of our Organisation, a very reason why it was indeed established, was to deploy its technical expertise in the cause of non-proliferation. To question the objectivity, impartiality, integrity or capacity of the OPCW and its investigative arms is not only to prejudice the fight against chemical weapons, but also to call into question the vital architecture of non-proliferation. The international community is justified in its trust of the Director-General and this Organisation.

Colleagues, in a short time responsibility for action will be ours yet again. When the FFM reports, this Executive Council will be called upon to do its duty under the Convention, as guardians of this Convention, to promote effective implementation and compliance.

How we meet this challenge will reflect not only our commitment to the Convention but whether this Council is capable of meeting its duty to ensure the prohibition of chemical weapons.

That objective will only be realised when no State Party to our Convention seeks to excuse the perpetrators. No nation should any longer defend the indefensible.

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