

AUSTRALIA
STATEMENT BY H.E. DR GREGORY FRENCH
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF AUSTRALIA TO THE OPCW
AT THE 29TH SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES

Chairperson,

Australia commends and supports the leadership of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Director-General Arias and the Technical Secretariat for its impartial and professional work in supporting the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). Australia welcomes H.E. Mr Almir Šahović's leadership in chairing the 29th Session of the Conference of the States Parties and assures him of our full support in conducting the work of this session.

The Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) is one of the key pillars of the global disarmament and non-proliferation regimes. Australia remains strongly committed to its full and effective implementation to ensure a world free of chemical weapons. The historical horrors of chemical weapons use and the chemical threats we continue to face serve as enduring reminders of the importance of a system based on agreed rules and norms. We will always be better off in a world that operates by rules that all countries have a say in shaping. A world where all countries have the freedom to decide our own futures, without interference and intimidation. A world where we can find collective solutions to our toughest problems. Where no country dominates, and no country is dominated.

Working with the OPCW and partners to lift the Pacific voice in the multilateral institutions in The Hague remains a key priority for Australia. We will continue to work with States Parties to ensure a peaceful, safe, and resilient Pacific region. Australia commends the Technical Secretariat's efforts to strengthen CWC implementation and enhance chemical security in the region, including through the recent Regional Conference on Enforcing Effective Customs Control over the Trade and Transit of Toxic Chemicals in the Pacific Region held in Vanuatu in September 2024, which Australia was pleased to support. We express our gratitude to the OPCW for organising the Workshop on Advancing Implementing Legislation on the CWC, which was held in Fiji with New Zealand's support. We look forward to strengthening engagement in our region to promote CWC implementation and ensure regional security, including through the OPCW Partnership Programme with Malaysia and capacity building initiatives in the Pacific.

Following the verified destruction of all declared chemical weapons stockpiles in 2023, important challenges remain. The use and threat of chemical weapons use by both State and non-State actors is very concerning. It's vital that the OPCW remains capable and prepared to effectively respond to all threats.

As a proud contributor to the OPCW Centre for Chemistry and Technology, Australia is pleased to see that the ChemTech Centre has effectively expanded opportunities for international cooperation, training, and capacity building. We also look forward to building on the OPCW's first Table-Top Exercise on Chemical Terrorism, which Australia co-facilitated in 2023, to further enhance States Parties' preparedness to tackle the global challenge of reducing chemical weapons threats.

We commend the Technical Secretariat and the Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) for their work in staying abreast of the latest technological and scientific developments, including potential opportunities and risks associated with emerging technologies. This year, Mexico, Indonesia, the Republic of Korea, Türkiye, and Australia – the MIKTA countries - hosted the first CSP side event in the MIKTA context focussed on Artificial Intelligence. We will continue to work with States Parties to

ensure that the OPCW can respond to, and harness the benefits of, emerging technologies including through MIKTA's positive and effective cross-regional collaboration.

Australia reiterates its full support for the independent, impartial, and thorough work of the Technical Secretariat and its Syria Missions, including the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT), the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM), and the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT). These teams have consistently delivered their work with the highest levels of integrity and impartiality and have proved themselves invaluable to the OPCW's work and achieving CWC objectives.

The IIT continues to deliver on its mandate to identify the perpetrators of specific instances of chemical weapons use. Established in 2018 in a manner completely consistent with the OPCW's mandate and the CSP Rules of Procedure, the IIT has provided timely and thorough analyses of chemical weapons use, as demonstrated by the IIT's third report, which identified reasonable grounds to believe that the Syrian Arab Air Force conducted a chemical weapons attack in Douma, Syria, on 7 April 2018, as well as the IIT's fourth report, which identified reasonable grounds to believe that ISIL carried out a sulphur mustard attack in Marea, Syria, in September 2015. We once again strongly condemn the Syrian Arab Republic's repeated use of chemical weapons as well as ISIL's use of chemical weapons. We call on Syria to fulfil its obligations under the CWC, cooperate in good faith with the Technical Secretariat, and resolve the 19 issues that the OPCW has identified in Syria's initial declaration.

We reiterate our resounding condemnation of Russia's illegal, unprovoked, and immoral invasion of Ukraine in blatant violation of international law, including the UN Charter. Australia reiterates its support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. We commend the assistance provided by the Technical Secretariat and States Parties to Ukraine, including through the two recent Technical Assistance Visits. In addition to Russia's deplorable bombings of chemical production facilities in Ukraine, we are appalled by reports of Russia's repeated use of riot control agents and scheduled chemical agents as methods of warfare in Ukraine, which is strictly prohibited by the CWC. Any possible breaches of the CWC should be investigated and documented in an OPCW report. We also call on Russia to halt its targeted disinformation campaign and attempts to undermine the CWC and deflect blame on Ukraine and western countries. While Russia attempts to mask its culpability with allegations that completely lack the rigour and impartiality prescribed by CWC verification processes, Australia remains clear-eyed about who is using chemical weapons in Ukraine. To this end, Australia has joined many international partners in calling out Russian disinformation, including at the OPCW.

Australia is deeply concerned by the findings from the 18 November TAV report, which confirms the presence of riot control agents in samples collected from the frontlines of Ukraine. Australia commends the OPCW's thorough and impartial investigation, including methods to verify the chain of custody of samples and that independent analysis of samples was conducted at two separate OPCW-designated laboratories, according to OPCW procedures.

Almost one year has passed since the death of Alexei Navalny in a Russian prison. Another year without answers from Russia in response to the questions raised by 45 States Parties under Article IX of the CWC following Mr Navalny's poisoning with a Novichok nerve agent. Instead, we have a proliferation of disinformation from Russia, including via Notes Verbales, about what happened in Salisbury and to Mr Navalny. Australia holds the Russian Government solely responsible for Mr Navalny's mistreatment and death. Mr Navalny's cruel death only underlines more poignantly Russia's responsibility under the CWC to conduct a full and impartial investigation into Mr Navalny's poisoning.

Australia shares the serious concerns expressed by many States Parties regarding the grave humanitarian crises caused by ongoing global conflicts, including in Gaza, Ukraine and Sudan. Australia supports the Technical Secretariat's important and independent role in monitoring the potential use of chemical weapons. Where there is credible evidence of possible CWC breaches, the Technical Secretariat should act as mandated by the CWC.

Australia is pleased to support the Revised 2025 Programme and Budget, which we consider fair and reasonable and reflective of the full breadth of the OPCW's work. We thank the budget co-facilitators, Poland and Mexico, for their effective and transparent consultation process, and the Technical Secretariat for their support.

Australia supports efforts by States Parties and the Technical Secretariat to promote diversity and inclusion at the OPCW whilst maintaining the highest possible standards of efficiency, integrity, and competence. This includes initiatives to promote gender equality, tenure flexibility, CWC universality, geographic representation, and strengthened engagement with civil society. It is regrettable that two State Parties chose to block consensus on Germany and Costa Rica's working paper on efforts to streamline the NGO accreditation process. We thank Ambassador Schieb of Germany and Ambassador Brenes Castro of Costa Rica for their tireless efforts and detailed reporting to the CSP. We look forward to building on this important work in the future.

Australia will continue to work with States Parties and Australia Group participants in our capacity as the permanent Chair of the Australia Group to ensure the full and effective implementation of the CWC through the harmonisation of national export controls of sensitive and dual-use items. This important work helps to reduce the risk of inadvertently contributing to the proliferation of chemical and biological weapons by facilitating the application of appropriate export controls. We look forward to continuing this important work with Australia Group participants and international partners to ensure peaceful legitimate trade in chemicals while strengthening the Convention.

Australia reaffirms our ongoing commitment to the OPCW and Director-General Arias in supporting the implementation of the CWC. We will continue to work with States Parties and the Technical Secretariat to consign chemical weapons to the history books.

Thank you, Chairperson.