

AUSTRALIA
STATEMENT BY DR GREGORY FRENCH
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF AUSTRALIA TO THE OPCW
AT THE 107TH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Chairperson,

Australia would like to commend the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Director-General Arias and the Technical Secretariat for their leadership and their continued professionalism, integrity, and impartiality in supporting the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). The Chairperson of the 107th Session of the Executive Council, H.E. Mr Andrés Terán Perral, can count on our full support in conducting the work of this session.

Australia remains strongly committed to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) as one of the cornerstones of the global disarmament and non-proliferation regimes. Building on the bedrock of rules that underpin the international system, at the heart of which is the UN Charter, we have all committed to a world free of chemical weapons. We are determined to uphold these mutually agreed rules and norms to ensure that all countries – no matter their size – abide by the same international rules and agreements.

Having celebrated unprecedented milestones in 2023, it is now time to face the serious challenges of the future. The challenges facing the OPCW and States Parties continue to evolve. We must all work together to ensure that the OPCW can effectively respond to the use and threats of use of toxic chemicals by both State and non-State actors. The OPCW Centre for Chemistry and Technology, to which Australia is a contributor, has expanded opportunities for international cooperation and capacity building for all States Parties.

At the same time, we are witnessing rapid advancements in science and technology which, despite their potential benefits, could pose serious risks to our shared goals under the Convention. We deeply appreciate the work of the OPCW to stay abreast of the latest developments in this field and welcome the inclusion of emerging technologies as a standing topic on the Executive Council agenda. Building on the discussions at the Conference on Artificial Intelligence and WMDs hosted in Berlin earlier this year, we look forward to the outcomes of the upcoming Global Conference on AI in CWC Implementation in Rabat.

Ensuring a peaceful, safe, and resilient Pacific region remains a key priority for Australia, and the CWC is an important part of this. Australia continues to work closely with the OPCW and our partners to ensure that Pacific voices are heard in the multilateral institutions in The Hague. We continue to support ways to strengthen CWC implementation and enhance chemical security in the Indo Pacific region, including through our OPCW Partnership Programme with Malaysia. Australia commends the OPCW's Pacific capacity building initiatives and was pleased to support the Regional Conference on Enforcing Effective Customs Control over the Trade and Transit of Toxic Chemicals in the Pacific Region, held in Vanuatu last month. We also welcome the Workshop on Advancing Implementing Legislation on the CWC, which was held in Fiji with New Zealand's support.

Australia commends the independent, impartial, and thorough work of the OPCW's Syria Missions, including the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT), the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT), and the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM). The IIT was established in 2018 in a manner completely consistent with the OPCW's mandate and the provisions of the CWC and has since proved itself invaluable to the work of this organisation. Australia remains deeply concerned 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 condemn in the strongest possible terms both the Syrian Arab Republic's repeated use of chemical weapons and ISIL's use of these weapons. Australia supported the decision at the 28th Session of the Conference of the States Parties to address chemical weapons use by Syria and non-state actors. We call on Syria to comply with its CWC obligations, fully cooperate with the Technical Secretariat, and resolve the nineteen serious outstanding issues in its initial declaration, including two recently identified new issues.

We strongly condemn Russia's illegal and immoral invasion of Ukraine, which is a grave violation of international law. The world has witnessed Russia's deplorable bombings of chemical production facilities in Ukraine and credible reports of Russia's repeated use of riot control agents and scheduled chemical substances as a method of warfare in Ukraine. The use of riot control agents as a method of warfare is strictly prohibited by the Convention. We urge Russia to comply with its CWC obligations, respond to requests submitted under Ar IX, paph 3, of the CWC to clarify deeply disturbing reports of use of prohibited agents, and cease its disinformation campaign.

Australia supports resolutely Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and we welcome the help given by the OPCW and States Parties in response to Ukraine's requests for assistance and protection. The OPCW's Technical Assistance Visits to Ukraine in July and September 2024 are a testament to the OPCW's crucial role in providing assistance and protection under Article X of the CWC. Any possible CWC breaches should be investigated and identified in an OPCW report.

It has been over seven months since the death of Alexei Navalny in a Russian prison. As the Australian Government made clear, we hold the Russian Government solely responsible for Mr Navalny's mistreatment and death. Mr Navalny's death does not absolve Russia of any responsibility to investigate his earlier poisoning with a Novichok nerve agent. Australia calls upon Russia to conduct a full and impartial investigation and provide credible answers the questions raised by 45 States Parties under Article IX of the CWC in October 2021 in relation to Mr Navalny's poisoning.

In the context of the grave humanitarian crises caused by ongoing global conflicts, Australia shares the serious concerns expressed by many States Parties. Australia welcomes and supports the Technical Secretariat's important and independent role in monitoring the potential use of chemical weapons in different conflict situations. Where there is credible evidence of possible CWC breaches, the Technical Secretariat should act as mandated by the CWC and assist States Parties as required.

In our role as the permanent Chair of the Australia Group, we are working with States Parties and Australia Group participants to ensure effective CWC implementation through the harmonisation of national export controls of sensitive and dual-use items. The work of the Australia Group facilitates the application of appropriate export controls to reduce the risk of inadvertently contributing to the proliferation of chemical and biological weapons. Together with our partners, Australia will continue to undertake this work to strengthen the CWC and enable peaceful legitimate trade.

Australia thanks the Technical Secretariat and Polish and Mexican delegations for conducting a transparent budget consultation process. We support the Revised 2025 Programme and Budget, which is fair and reasonable. It reflects the broad spectrum of the OPCW's work and will ensure the OPCW has the funding necessary to carry out its mandate. We continue to support the efforts by the Technical Secretariat and States Parties to promote diversity and inclusion at the OPCW whilst maintaining the highest possible standards of efficiency, integrity, and competence - including

initiatives to promote gender equality, geographic representation, tenure flexibility, and strengthened engagement with civil society. We also welcome efforts to promote CWC universality.

Australia is committed to our goal of a world free of chemical weapons and will continue to support the OPCW in its pivotal work. Peace is not a gift, and it is never a given. It is a duty we all share.

I ask that this statement be made an official document of the 107th Session of the Executive Council, and for it to be published on the OPCW external server and the public website.

Thank you, Chairperson.