



**STATEMENT  
TO THE TWENTIETH SESSION OF  
THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES TO  
THE CHEMICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION**

**BY**

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Mr Chairman

May I join others in congratulating you on your election as Chair of this Conference of States Parties. On behalf of Australia, I pledge my delegation's support towards achieving a successful outcome to this Conference.

Mr Chairman

The history of mankind's efforts to limit the conduct of war has been an unhappy one. Even regulating "weapons of mass destruction", the most deadly weaponry of all, has been a constant struggle.

But, by any measure, the Chemical Weapons Convention has been a remarkable success. With near universal membership and the steady destruction of chemical weapons, the OPCW is making good progress to rid the world of the menace of chemical weapons.

In this context, Australia welcomes Myanmar and Angola as the newest States Parties to the Convention. We urge those few countries remaining outside the Convention to join as soon as possible.

Mr Chairman

This body – the OPCW – must be reshaped to meet the challenges of tomorrow, when all remaining chemical weapons are finally destroyed.

For Australia, the key to this future will be preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons.

This will mean ensuring the Technical Secretariat retains expertise and resources to fulfil its core mandate: that is, to verify and inspect.

It will mean making the best use of technical assistance programs – those of the OPCW and governments – to help every State Party implement its national obligations.

It will mean focusing the OPCW's education and outreach tools to marshal the support of all stakeholders across industry, academia and government. And we urge this Conference to establish the proposed Advisory Board on Education and Outreach.

It will mean preventing and responding to the use of toxic chemicals by non-state actors.

And it will mean supporting the Scientific Advisory Board and the Technical Secretariat to respond to future scientific developments and emerging threats. Australia welcomes the Board's Report on Verification and encourages further work to strengthen this cornerstone of the Convention.

Mr Chairman

We cannot sit still. As mankind devises new means to kill and harm, humanity must also seek better means of redress. International law must adapt to new war crimes and new chemical threats.

Many States Parties believe that an unchecked threat to the architecture of the Chemical Weapons Convention, capable of undermining its integrity, are Central Nervous System-Acting Chemicals.

It is true. These chemicals have legitimate, peaceful uses – for example, as anaesthetics and sedatives for medical purposes. Australia would never seek to restrict the production of these chemicals for such uses.

However, many of these chemicals are highly dangerous – as toxic as sarin and other nerve agents we ban under the Convention. It is not possible to disperse these chemicals through the air – *en masse* – without significant risk of death or serious injury.

If these toxic chemicals were used in battle, it would without question violate the Chemical Weapons Convention. We believe they should have no place in the armouries of our defence forces or our law enforcement agencies.

Mr Chairman

Australia and other States Parties have submitted a joint paper to this Conference, called ‘Aerosolisation of Central Nervous System-Acting Chemicals’. This paper calls for two actions by States Parties:

First, a start to long-overdue discussions about these chemicals within the OPCW.

Second, for States Parties which are in a position to do so, to articulate their national positions on the use of these chemicals for law enforcement purposes.

Mr Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to invite you to lunch. Today, Australia and our friends from Switzerland will host a side-event on Central Nervous System-Acting Chemicals. I hope all delegations will participate and engage in the discussion.

Mr Chairman

Chemical weapons – these weapons of mass destruction – are indiscriminate tools of suffering born in the era of trench warfare, yet persisting into the twenty-first century. For a moment, it did seem that the threat of chemical weapons had finally been checked by our collective resolve and the birth of the Chemical Weapons Convention and the OPCW.

Well, so we had hoped. But optimists though we were, fools we are not.

Mr Chairman, two years ago – 16 years after the Convention entered into force – we were jolted from our complacency by the use of sarin gas against civilians in Syria. Since then, the Syrian people have faced the terror of helicopters dropping barrel bombs of toxic chlorine gas. Australia has no doubt that the Assad regime is responsible for these crimes.

And it gets worse. It now appears that terrorist groups like ISIS are also using toxic chemicals to kill civilians.

Australia applauds the commitment and professionalism of the Technical Secretariat in responding to these grave threats to the substance and spirit of our Convention:

First, the Fact-Finding Missions.

Then the work of the Declaration Assessment Team in shedding light on Syria's activities.

Verifying and destroying Syria's declared chemical weapons and production facilities.

And of course, the Technical Secretariat's vital support to the United Nations Security Council, most recently through the Joint Investigative Mechanism.

I pledge Australia's continuing, unqualified support for the work of the OPCW and the JIM.

Mr Chairman

Just as the human spirit serves the work of both angels and demons, so do our tools of chemistry both give life and take it.

While perhaps we have learned to temper our own worst instincts by the hammer blows of brutal experience, none of us, I fear, has a solution to the failings of the human condition.

But we do have a solution to the depredations of using chemical weapons for war – they are the Chemical Weapons Convention and the OPCW. Let us always strengthen their purpose and their spirit.

Mr Chairman, I thank you.