



OPCW

Executive Council

Fifty-Eighth Meeting
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AUSTRALIA

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

Mr Chairperson, colleagues

Earlier this month we stood in this chamber – in silence, in unity, and with dignity – to remember all victims of chemical weapons attacks, including from Khan Shaykhun, the Syrian Arab Republic.

In that moment of shared solidarity, we could not have imagined gathering again so soon to condemn yet another attack in the Syrian Arab Republic – where toxic chemicals have been used time and time again.

Mr Chairperson

In Australia's two years on this Executive Council, we have witnessed genuine commitment and solemn pledges by colleagues – united against the use of chemical weapons.

How often have we heard States Parties dutifully repeat the refrain – we condemn the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere, under any circumstances?

We have heard eloquent speeches and witnessed practical deeds in defence of our Chemical Weapons Convention and the integrity of our Organisation. The destruction of ninety-six per cent of the world's declared stockpile of chemical weapons is a major achievement.

But it is appalling that, contrary to the obligations and spirit of the Convention, some States Parties have not fully declared their stockpiles.

This is a betrayal of the work that the OPCW and its States Parties undertake.

Mr Chairperson, the failure to deter, and to prevent, the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian Arab Republic – a State Party to the Convention, and a fellow OPCW member – should weigh heavily on this Executive Council.

The more optimistic among us had hoped that, despite persistent gaps, inadequacies and discrepancies in the Syrian Arab Republic's declaration, the Syrian Arab Republic might finally embrace fully its responsibilities as a member of our Organisation.



Then, we hoped the Syrian Arab Republic's closest allies, the Russian Federation – a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council with special responsibility for maintaining international peace and security, and a guarantor of the Syrian Arab Republic's compliance with the Convention; and the Islamic Republic of Iran – itself a victim of chemical weapons attacks – would exert their influence in the Syrian Arab Republic to ensure these unlawful and cruel weapons would never be used again.

But Mr Chairperson, it appears nothing said here in this chamber has had any impact on the Assad Regime and its willingness to use chemical weapons. Nothing seems to have any bearing on this illegal and inhumane conduct.

Mr Chairperson

Because of the Syrian Arab Republic and because of the Syrian Arab Republic's allies, chemical weapons – these weapons of mass destruction – are now being used as weapons of war.

The world cannot stand idly by without taking action to prevent the use of chemical weapons in violation of international laws and norms.

For this reason, Australia supported the strikes by the United States, United Kingdom and France on chemical weapons facilities in the Syrian Arab Republic. The strikes were calibrated, proportionate and targeted. They were strictly limited in their aim.

The strikes send an unequivocal message to the Assad regime and its allies, the Russian Federation and the Islamic Republic of Iran, that the use of chemical weapons will not and cannot be tolerated.

Mr Chairperson

Any address to the Syrian Arab Republic in this chamber can no longer be inspired by any confidence. There have been many allegations of chemical weapons use by the Syrian Arab Republic and four cases confirmed by an impartial and independent mechanism.

We appeal to you, our Russian and Iranian colleagues, not to obstruct or undermine the deliberations of this Executive Council, or the vital, professional and impartial investigations of our Organisation and its Fact-Finding Mission.

Responsible States do not look the other way when fundamental norms of the international community are breached. Those who use, enable or shield the use of chemical weapons must be brought to account.

Mr Chairperson

Last week Australia co-sponsored a United Nations Security Council Resolution calling for the establishment of a new United Nations investigative and attribution mechanism to assess this chemical weapons attack, which unfortunately the Russian Federation again vetoed.

This new United Nations mechanism would have supported the efforts of our Organisation to undertake its vital work – holding to account those who use chemical weapons.

Mr Chairperson

Let me address finally each of my colleagues who sit with me as members on this Executive Council:

Colleagues, the world is watching. As the Executive Council of States Parties to our Convention, our words and our actions carry far beyond the walls of this chamber.

As custodians of our Convention, we must condemn this latest chemical attack on civilians in Douma. This Executive Council cannot remain silent, as it has for 12 months following the deadly sarin attack in Khan Shaykhun. We can no longer duck our responsibility. Silence is not an option.

This Executive Council must deliver on its duty to speak out each and every time chemical weapons are used.

Our collective condemnation must be aired anew at every opportunity. And our Convention defended without fail.

Let current and future generations not find us wanting.

Mr Chairperson, I thank you.

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