Mr Chairman

Further violations of the Chemical Weapons Convention continue to test our resolve to defend this key international treaty and norm of behaviour. Our collective challenge is to follow and enforce the rules we have set ourselves, and that includes identifying those who violate the Convention.

In June, Australia was proud to contribute to an outcome that strengthened the hand of global non-proliferation. A Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties was called to confront the resurgent and highly regrettable use of chemical weapons in Syria, Iraq, Malaysia and the UK.
In an overwhelming signal of support for the critical role the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) plays in countering chemical weapons use, the Organisation was accorded the mandate to attribute responsibility for use of such weapons in Syria, and how to address universal attribution.

Australia calls on all Member States to strongly support the OPCW Director-General in establishing an attribution mechanism on Syria, and developing a global attribution capacity. Creating such instruments sends a clear message – that users of chemical weapons will be held to account.

Mr Chairman

Australia is unapologetic in reasserting the importance for non-proliferation of identifying and holding to account those who use chemical weapons. When renewal of the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism’s mandate was blocked, the international community explored other options, including through the French-led International Partnership Against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons.

Next month we will assemble in The Hague to review the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention over the past five years – years which have been unlike any other in its history – and to work to ensure the Convention’s longer-term viability. The use of chemical weapons in Syria remains a dark legacy of shame for the Syrian regime and its backers, and for certain non-state actors. We commend the on-going work of the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission, and Declaration Assessment Team, on Syria.
We also commend the OPCW’s work in responding to the use of a new nerve agent in the UK, at the UK’s request. Such violations of international law must not be allowed to continue with impunity. It is in all our interests to do whatever we can to strengthen the global norm against any use of chemical weapons, by anyone, anywhere.

Of course the UN Security Council should retain authority for addressing international security concerns from any use of chemical weapons, and deciding on appropriate steps and consequences. But it also makes sense that Chemical Weapons Convention States Parties should be able to attribute responsibility for violations of the Convention, including to deter others who might consider using these reprehensible weapons with impunity.

Mr Chairman

We must continue to work collaboratively to adjust policies and regulations to reflect constantly-evolving new threats and technologies in the WMD field, including through robust export controls. The Australia Group, which we chair, brings together 43 participants committed to harmonising export controls to prevent rogue states and terrorists from obtaining what they need to build chemical and biological weapons. Through the regular meetings of this Group, participating countries continue to collaborate on new ways to curb proliferation of chemical and biological weapons.

But to succeed in this task, we need the help of all countries. That’s why Australia Group members are working closely with non-members, across
many regions, to share best practices and address how to strengthen our collective efforts to prevent the spread and use of these odious weapons.

Mr Chairman

The Biological Weapons Convention not only underpins the international norms against biological weapons, but also facilitates global efforts to promote the peaceful uses of the life sciences. We remain committed to strengthening the Convention, and welcomed constructive discussions during Experts Meetings in August, as part of the current intersessional process. One immediate action needed is to resolve the serious financial situation, exacerbated by some States Parties failing to pay their annual contributions.

Mr Chairman

Resolution 1540 remains central to Member States’ efforts to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction to terrorists and non-state actors. We urge all Member States to fulfil their obligations under the Resolution.

Thank you.

685 words/5 mins