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First Committee: thematic statement on other weapons of mass destruction

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Delivered by Mr Ian McConville, Australian Deputy Permanent Representative to the Conference on Disarmament, Geneva

(Check against delivery)

Mr Chairman,

Events this year have provided a graphic reminder of the very real threat to global and regional peace and security posed by Weapons of Mass Destruction. These events are a grave reminder of why we must remain committed in our efforts to counter the proliferation of chemical and biological weapons. And a reminder of why we need to remain clear that there are no circumstances justifying the use of such weapons.

Australia remains deeply concerned by these threats, which as contemporary events demonstrate, are current and pressing.

Mr Chairman,

Like many countries, Australia has expressed outrage over the use of chemical weapons in Syria, including the attack in Damascus neighbourhoods on 21 August. The use of chemical weapons is an egregious violation of international law, and it is vital that perpetrators of such crimes not escape justice.

Australia has welcomed the adoption by the Security Council of Resolution 2118 on the elimination of Syria's chemical weapons as well as the related decision by the Executive Council of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). These decisions have established extraordinary procedures for the elimination of Syria's chemical weapons under an accelerated timetable. They have also made clear that the use of chemical weapons by anyone in any circumstances is abhorrent and will not be tolerated by the international community.

Our focus must now turn to the full and prompt implementation of these decisions. We commend the United Nations and the OPCW for the work they have done already in challenging circumstances to begin the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons arsenal.

Timeframes are tight but will be achievable so long as the Syrian authorities cooperate unconditionally with both organisations and fulfil their obligation to ensure the complete, final, verifiable and enforceable destruction of their chemical weapons, and all related materials and equipment.

Mr Chairman,

Countering the threat posed by chemical and biological weapons demands undiminished commitment to strengthening implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Biological Weapons Convention, UN Security Council Resolution 1540 and its successor resolutions, as well as related export control regimes.

As the only verifiable disarmament treaty to ban comprehensively an entire category of weapons, the **Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC)** plays an integral role in the international security regime and global non-proliferation efforts.

Australia is committed to working with others to uphold the strength and integrity of the CWC. We remain strongly committed to achieving the goals of universal adherence, coupled with full and effective implementation of the CWC; the destruction of all existing chemical weapons and their non-proliferation; and maintenance of this position through effective verification regimes. Australia pledges its support and assistance in the fulfilment of these objectives and urges all States not-Party to the CWC to join without further delay. With this in mind, Australia is pleased to support Poland, which is again presenting its annual resolution on the implementation of the CWC.

Australia was pleased to participate actively in the Third Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties to Review the Operation of the Chemical Weapons Convention held in April this year. This Review Conference provided a valuable opportunity to take-stock of developments over the past five years and to reinforce our shared and unequivocal commitment to the global chemical weapons ban.

States Parties can be satisfied with the achievements of the Convention since its entry into force. But continued effort is required to safeguard the longevity of the CWC and ensure there will be no re-emergence of chemical weapons. The Review Conference was also a timely opportunity to map out the OPCW's priorities for the coming five years and identify where we need to recalibrate and redouble our efforts.

Australia urges chemical weapons possessor states to make every effort to ensure all remaining stockpiles of chemical weapons are destroyed at the earliest possible date but no later than their planned completion dates. We strongly encourage all States Parties which have not fully implemented their Article VII obligations to continue their efforts to establish a National Authority, as well as legislation that cover all key areas of the Convention. And Australia remains committed to ensuring the continued success of the OPCW beyond the destruction of all chemical weapons, so that it can meet non-proliferation challenges now and into the future and help ensure chemical weapons will never be used again.

Mr Chairman,

As the cornerstone of multilateral efforts to prevent the proliferation of biological and toxic weapons, the **Biological Weapons Convention (BWC)** is another key instrument in international non-proliferation and disarmament architecture. This important Convention not only underpins the international consensus against biological weapons, it also facilitates global efforts to promote peaceful use of the life sciences.

While recent developments pose clear challenges to the BWC, they also underline the contemporary relevance of the BWC. Advances in biosciences and biotechnology continue to make the pursuit of a biological weapons program ever more feasible for a growing number of countries, if they were to decide on such a course.

And as the life sciences continue to develop rapidly, the current intersessional process presents an invaluable opportunity to develop a practical vision and roadmap for the Convention going forward - to ensure the BWC keeps up with relevant developments in science and technology, for which industry and academe are increasingly the primary drivers. It is also an opportunity to ensure that all States not only share the responsibilities, but also the benefits of this unique Convention. In this regard, Australia was pleased to participate actively in this year's Meeting of Experts – including by facilitating a fruitful discussion on compliance - as part of our commitment to strengthening effective implementation of this Convention.

Mr Chairman,

Regional exchanges make an increasingly important contribution to multilateral efforts to counter the proliferation of biological and chemical weapons - and Australia plays an active role in the Asia-Pacific. This year, we are pleased to have joined regional partners to participate in workshops organised by the OPCW and the governments of Malaysia and Indonesia. These workshops have aimed at building the capacity of regional countries to respond to major chemical incidents and strengthen implementation of the CWC. Together with the Philippines and the United States, Australia was also pleased to again co-chair the ASEAN Regional Forum intersessional meeting on non-proliferation and disarmament in Manila.

Mr Chairman,

As well as nurturing and strengthening vital multilateral infrastructure, it remains crucial that States have in place the necessary measures to avoid being unwitting agents of proliferation. Australia's commitment to bolstering non-proliferation is reflected in its active support for numerous international arrangements establishing global best practice in the control of exports of WMD-related items, ballistic missile technologies, and other sensitive goods and technologies.

We chair the **Australia Group**, a cooperative and voluntary group which strengthens global security by making it harder and more expensive for would-be proliferators to obtain the dual-use materials, equipment and technology sought to develop chemical or biological weapons. The Australia Group common guidelines and export control lists provide an international benchmark to help all UN Member States fulfil their obligations

under UN Security Council Resolution 1540 and related Resolutions. More recently the Group has been working to highlight the chemical weapons threat in Syria and to encourage all countries to intensify scrutiny of exports to Syria to ensure they do not contribute to that threat.

Our activity in the year ahead will see the ongoing process of updating and refining the control standards and the broadest possible program of outreach. To this end we plan to convene an inaugural Australia Group Dialogue meeting in conjunction with our regular Intersessional Implementation Meeting in Budapest in November. The Dialogue is one aspect of a new mechanism through which the Australia Group hopes to engage a wider base of non-member countries in a more structured dialogue on practical export control implementation issues. Our efforts have seen an increasing number of countries draw on the work of the Australia Group to strengthen their national control systems and consequently global standards are steadily improving.

The Australia Group's guidelines and export control lists also provide an international benchmark, to assist UN Member States to meet their obligations pursuant to **UN Security Council Resolution 1540**. This resolution remains paramount to combatting the challenge of WMD proliferation. Full implementation by UN Member States of Resolution 1540 remains an enduring international security priority. It is for that reason that Australia plays an active role in the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI). This year, the PSI commemorated its 10th anniversary, an event that enabled participating UN Member States to exchange information and increase awareness of key proliferation threats.

But despite these efforts, significant challenges remain. Scientific developments and the availability of increasingly sophisticated production techniques offer proliferators new options. At the same time the increasingly wide availability of sophisticated goods combined with new procurement channels mean that we need to be constantly vigilant and proactive. It is our collective job to ensure that we cooperate and coordinate our efforts to address and respond to these new challenges.

I thank you, Mr Chairman.