



Statement by H.E Dell Higgle

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Conference on Disarmament**

**UNGA73: First Committee
Other Weapons of Mass Destruction**

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Mr Chair,

I welcome the opportunity of today's debate to reiterate New Zealand's firm support for the provisions of International Humanitarian Law and for our commitment not to permit impunity for those who breach it.

We reaffirm the importance of full compliance with the 1925 Geneva Protocol as well as the Chemical Weapons Convention. We urge all countries that have not acceded to the CWC – South Sudan, Israel, Egypt, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea – to do so as a real priority.

Any breach of IHL is unacceptable – but it is particularly abhorrent when it involves weapons so clearly incapable of distinguishing between civilians and combatants as chemical weapons and which have been the subject of such long-standing efforts to abolish them since their usage in the First World War. The international community's comprehensive prohibition against them has been in place now for some decades.

Any use of chemical weapons is a very clear violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention. In the words of the Secretary-General in his Agenda for Disarmament: "Each and every use of a chemical weapon is an international crime". It is disappointing in the extreme that despite this status of international criminality we, as a community of nations, have had to witness their ongoing use in recent times. A recently issued report by the Technical Secretariat of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons

(OPCW) records 143 instances of alleged chemical weapons use in Syria, from 1 December 2015 to 8 October 2018 inclusive, and 17 cases in 2018 alone. We have also seen highly disturbing instances of the use of extremely lethal chemical agents as instruments of assassination.

New Zealand has condemned these instances of chemical weapons usage - in Syria, Iraq, Malaysia and the United Kingdom. We will continue to condemn any such use – anytime and anywhere - as we look to uphold this fundamental obligation of IHL.

While it has been pleasing to see how robustly much of the international community has defended the core principles of the Chemical Weapons Convention, any complacency on our part could contribute to an erosion of this. New Zealand remains deeply concerned about the impunity with which perpetrators have carried out these attacks and our participation in the new International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons underlines our commitment to hold to account any individual, group or government daring to use chemical weapons.

In that regard, we will continue to support effective methods to identify those who use chemical weapons and we welcome the OPCW's recent decision to develop a universal attribution capability. That said, however, 2018 will stand as a difficult year for the OPCW and for those who seek to further its work in eliminating chemical weapons.

We support the proposals which the Secretary-General has made in his Agenda for Disarmament regarding chemical, and also with regard to biological, weapons. We acknowledge the need to guard against any possible undermining of the success of the century-long effort to outlaw these weapons. The OPCW must be properly supported and equipped for future tasks and New Zealand looks forward to engaging in the fourth review conference of the Chemical Weapons Convention next month to this end.

In the meantime, we hope to see very widespread support in this Committee for the adoption of the resolution put forward this year on chemical weapons – L20.

Thank you.