

AUSTRALIA GROUP

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Statement by the Chair of the 2019 Australia Group Plenary

The forty-two Participating Countries of the Australia Group and the European Union met for the 34th Plenary in Paris on 3-7 June 2019. The Australia Group aims to ensure that legitimate trade in sensitive dual-use goods and technology takes place with minimal disruption while not contributing to the production of chemical or biological weapons. This is achieved through the harmonisation and coordination of export controls, information sharing and outreach.

Key outcomes

Australia Group (AG) participants reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening chemical and biological weapons-related counter-proliferation efforts. Among the measures agreed by the Group at the 34th Plenary were:

- reinforcing efforts to stay ahead of potential proliferators by increasing awareness of emerging technologies and the potential exploitation of scientific developments that could be used for chemical and biological weapons production and delivery;
- reaffirming support for the OPCW Director General, Technical Secretariat and the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT), to ensure chemical weapons users are held to account, and to deter others who might consider such use;
- substantial discussion of the possible listing of Novichoks precursors;
- sharing approaches to challenges posed by intangible technology transfers, proliferation financing, procurement, transshipment and broader proliferation networks, including through enhanced engagement with industry and academia;
- renewed commitment to work collaboratively and cooperatively with non-AG members and to share experiences in enforcing export controls, information, outcomes of investigations and operational activity; and
- enhancing outreach to non-members and continued efforts to encourage all states to implement robust export controls and to adopt Australia Group export controls as the model for international best practice.

Technical issues

Licensing and enforcement experts again exchanged experiences and ways to prevent the proliferation of sensitive dual-use chemicals, biological materials and related equipment.

The Group shared approaches for keeping pace with rapidly evolving technologies and discussed the challenges posed by increasingly complex proliferation financing. Participating experts continued their work to refine controls applied to the chemical and biological items on the Australia Group Control Lists and agreed to enhance efforts to safeguard laboratory security.

Updated Control Lists and the Australia Group Guidelines are available at <http://www.australiagroup.net>.

Outreach

Participants welcomed expansion of the Group's focus and ongoing efforts to enhance engagement with non-members. Participants agreed on the importance of further enhanced coordination to prevent the proliferation of goods, technology and information that could be used to enable chemical and biological weapons attacks, while not hindering legitimate trade.

Following on from the Australia Group Dialogue with Middle Eastern countries in Malta in March 2019, AG participants agreed to greater follow up with previous Dialogue partners and to continue to encourage all states to implement robust and effective national export controls and to adopt Australia Group export controls as the model for international best practice.

At the invitation of the Secretariat, guest speakers addressed the Plenary on various topics. Dr Filippa Lentzos, King's College London, gave a presentation on cloud laboratories; Dr Jonathan Brewer, King's College London, discussed counter-proliferation financing and the Australia Group export control regime; and Mr Kolja Brockmann from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute briefed the Plenary on additive manufacturing. AG participants reinforced the importance of outreach to industry and academia, noting the rapid pace of new scientific and technological developments.

Membership

The Australia Group welcomed current and potential future membership applications from several countries and undertook to engage with them further. No new members were admitted in 2019.

Adherence

The Australia Group reaffirmed its commitment to encouraging declarations of adherence to AG export control standards and objectives and the importance of adoption of Australia Group Guidelines and Control Lists by as many countries as possible.

Country Situations

AG participants expressed alarm at ongoing attempts by some countries since the 2018 CWC Conferences of States Parties to discredit the OPCW's investigative work, and reaffirmed their unequivocal and practical support for the OPCW Director General, Technical Secretariat and the effective implementation of the IIT. AG participants urged all countries to respect fully their obligations under international law, not to develop, produce or use chemical weapons, and to fully declare and completely destroy their chemical weapons programs pursuant to their obligations under the CWC.

AG participants stressed that the CWC Conference of the States Parties in November 2019 would be crucial to upholding the norm of global prohibition of any use of chemical weapons.

AG participants agreed that discussion of the potential listing of Novichoks precursors was a priority for the Australia Group over the coming year.

All AG participants reaffirmed their steadfast commitment and determination to continue working collectively and collaboratively including to ensure that exports from their territories do not contribute to the development or use of chemical or biological weapons, and on other measures to help safeguard and strengthen the global non-proliferation arrangements that are intended to keep all countries more secure and safe.

All AG participants agreed that the use of any chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere, cannot be tolerated under any circumstance.

Next Intersessional and Plenary

Australia Group participants agreed on the value of an Intersessional meeting to be conducted before the next Plenary in 2020 to include discussions on more effective implementation of catch-all controls and the possible listing of Novichoks precursors. AG participants accepted with thanks the Slovak Republic's offer to host an Intersessional meeting in early 2020.

Australia Group participants accepted France's offer to host the next AG Plenary in Paris from 15-19 June 2020.

Further information on the Australia Group is available at www.australiagroup.net.