

AUSTRALIA GROUP

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Statement by the Chair of the 2023 Australia Group Plenary

1. The Australia Group (AG), comprising 42 countries and the European Union, met for the 36th Australia Group Plenary in Paris from 5 to 9 June 2023.
2. The AG aims to ensure that trade in sensitive dual-use goods and technology does not contribute to the production or proliferation of chemical or biological weapons, and that legitimate trade is facilitated. This is achieved through the harmonisation and coordination of export controls, best practices, information sharing, outreach and public awareness raising. Each AG Participant implements domestic licensing and enforcement measures reflecting its AG commitments.

Key outcomes

3. Participants reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening chemical and biological weapons-related counter-proliferation efforts. The world continues to face persistent threats from chemical and biological weapons. Participants reaffirmed that the use of these weapons anywhere, at any time, by anyone, under any circumstances is unacceptable and prohibited under international law.
4. Participants reaffirmed the vital role of the AG in maintaining and enhancing international peace and security and countering the threat of the proliferation of biological and chemical weapons, complementing the work of the Nuclear Suppliers' Group, the Zangger Committee, the Missile Technology Control Regime, and the Wassenaar Arrangement. Strengthened global security is vital at a time when some States – and non-State actors – continue to seek to acquire, develop or use weapons of mass destruction (WMD) capabilities.
5. Participants supported a cooperative approach to strengthening existing non-proliferation arrangements while continuing to facilitate legitimate trade. Participants agreed that export control regimes provide the confidence, trust, and assurance necessary to make possible cooperation and legitimate international trade involving sensitive dual-use items. Participants affirmed that non-proliferation export control regimes promote economic development in this regard and contribute to strengthening global stability. They undertook to continue to promote the value and role of the AG, and other multilateral non-proliferation export control regimes of which they are a part, in all relevant interactions.
6. AG Participants urged all countries to respect fully their obligations under international law not to develop, produce or use chemical weapons. Participants underscored their continuing strong and unequivocal support for the Chemical Weapons Convention

(CWC) and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) as cornerstones in disarmament and the non-proliferation of chemical weapons. Participants expressed and reaffirmed support and appreciation for the OPCW's professionalism, impartiality, and integrity.

7. Participants noted the outcome of the Fifth CWC Review Conference (RC-5) in The Hague in May 2023. AG participants agreed to work constructively on the actionable matters identified in the RC-5 with a view to further facilitating the implementation of the Convention. Many AG Participants were among those which joined the statement on this issue delivered by France at RC-5 on behalf of 74 States parties.
8. Participants recalled instances of chemical weapons use over the past decade, including in Syria. Participants noted the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team's (IIT) conclusion of January 2023 that there were reasonable grounds to believe the Syrian Arab Air Forces had been the perpetrators of the chemical weapons attack on 7 April 2018 in Douma, Syrian Arab Republic, and urged Syria to fully cooperate with the OPCW Technical Secretariat.
9. Participants expressed concern regarding the use of chemical warfare agents against individuals. Participants recalled the use of a Novichok nerve agent in Salisbury, United Kingdom in 2018, and the death of Dawn Sturgess, a British national. Participants again called for a thorough and transparent investigation into Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny's poisoning using a Novichok nerve agent in August 2020.
10. Participants also discussed concerns about proliferation activities in other countries including Iran and North Korea.
11. Participants agreed on the importance of taking appropriate action to ensure all who use chemical weapons, or those who command, enable or shield those who use chemical weapons, are held to account.
12. Participants welcomed the fruitful discussions at the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) Review Conference in November-December 2022 and the formation of a new Working Group on the strengthening of the Convention. Participants also welcomed the outcome of the BWC Working Group organisational meeting, including the election of the bureau and the adoption of a timetable until 2026. Participants highlighted the critical role that effective export controls and the AG play in fulfilling the BWC objectives.
13. Recalling UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/ES-11/6, which deplored the dire consequences of the aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine, Participants discussed the threat of use by Russia of chemical and biological weapons and attacks at and in the vicinity of civil biological and chemical facilities in Ukraine. Participants discussed their actions to tighten controls on exports of sensitive dual-use goods and technologies in this regard and mentioned some national restrictive measures and explored ways to further coordinate activities in furtherance of non-proliferation objectives. Participants took note of ongoing developments in the OPCW and strongly condemned Russia's unsubstantiated claims about chemical and biological weapons, including claims against Ukraine and the United States which are AG Participants.

14. Participants recognised the ongoing threat of chemical and biological terrorism and the need to remain vigilant to procurement that could support such activities, and to guard against the misuse of chemical and biological technologies and equipment by non-state actors.
15. Participants recalled their support for UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1540 and its subsequent resolutions in countering proliferation threats from non-state actors, in particular for terrorist purposes. They recognised the important work of the Committee established pursuant to UNSC Resolution 1540 and welcomed the extension of its mandate in assisting States to meet their WMD non-proliferation and export control obligations under the Resolution.
16. Participants welcomed the valuable work of other non-proliferation groups such as the G7-led Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction and the International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons. These groups play important roles in the international system that combats the proliferation of chemical and biological weapons, including through exchanging information, coordinating action, and delivering capacity building assistance to prevent, detect and respond to chemical and biological warfare threats.

Technical issues

17. AG licensing and enforcement experts exchanged experiences and best practices to prevent the proliferation of sensitive dual-use chemicals, biological materials and related equipment and technology. The discussion highlighted the value of sharing challenges, learnings, and enhancements of the export controls enforcement community. The importance of effective Intangible Technology Transfer (ITT) controls was also discussed.
18. Participants shared approaches for keeping pace with rapidly evolving dual-use technologies and discussed the relevance of some of these technologies for non-proliferation and export control. Participants discussed novel delivery systems, novel production of chemicals, risks of misuse of emerging technologies, and technologies for combatting chemical and biological threats as well as improving enforcement. Participants exchanged best practices to mitigate risk associated with dual-use research of concern.
19. Noting the AG's control lists serve as a benchmark for global best practice, Participants continued their work to refine controls applied to the chemical and biological items on the lists. This included updates and the addition of new items to the AG's control lists in response to emerging threats.
20. Updated Control Lists and the AG Guidelines are available at www.australiagroup.net.

Outreach

21. Participants agreed to continue an active program of outreach to, and engagement with, non-participants, including AG unilateral adherents, to further enhance efforts to prevent the proliferation of chemical and biological weapons. They noted the importance of such outreach in order to build understanding of the role and value of the

AG, to facilitate the wider adoption of AG control lists and practices, and to support participation in the AG. Participants welcomed the significant outreach from the AG Chair and Secretariat, including at the Asian Export Control Seminar, the Regional Conference on Dual-Use Trade Controls, and the Catch All Controls Seminar, as well as the opportunity to interact with non-Participants attending the outreach session at the AG Intersessional meeting in Rome in February 2023.

22. Participants reinforced the value of outreach to, and engagement with, industry, academia and international organisations for enhancing understanding of the impact and pace of new scientific and technological developments.
23. At the invitation of the Secretariat, guest speakers addressed the Plenary. Participants thanked INTERPOL for its presentation on the tracking of non-state actor biological capabilities and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) for its presentations on responsible research and insights from academic teaching on raising awareness of security concerns.

Adherence

24. Participants reaffirmed their commitment to encouraging declarations of adherence and the importance of adoption of AG Guidelines and control lists by as many countries as possible, including countries with developing export control measures and key transport and transshipment hubs. Adherents are afforded a broad range of information from exchanges with the AG Chair and Participants to assist them in implementing global best practice in chemical and biological export controls.
25. Participants looked forward to further engagement with countries interested in unilateral adherence.

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Next Intersessional and Plenary

26. Participants thanked Italy for its hosting of the AG Intersessional meeting in Rome from 22-24 February 2023. Participants agreed on the value of an Intersessional meeting to be conducted before the next Plenary.
27. Participants accepted France's offer to host the next AG Plenary in Paris subject to the availability of the conference venue.
28. Further information on the Australia Group is available at www.australiagroup.net.