

AUSTRALIA GROUP

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Statement by the Chair of the 2024 Australia Group Plenary

1. The Australia Group (AG), comprising 42 countries and the European Union, met for the 37th Australia Group Plenary in Paris from 3 to 7 June 2024.
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 (CBW), and that legitimate trade is facilitated. This is achieved through the harmonisation and coordination of export controls through best practices, information sharing, outreach and public awareness raising. Each AG Participant implements domestic licensing and enforcement measures reflecting its AG commitments, and in accordance with each Participant's sovereign right to determine proliferation risks for themselves.
3. The AG's effectiveness is based on a shared commitment to counter-proliferation objectives and the strength of each Participant's national export control framework. It is also based on the transparency of the AG Common Control Lists and the AG's approach to the inclusion, modification or removal of items on these lists. This information is publicly available for use by both AG Participants and non-participants.
4. AG Participants are committed to expanding trade in chemical and biological items for peaceful purposes and maintaining active chemical and biotechnological industries. AG activities do not hinder legitimate trade involving chemicals, biological agents and related dual-use items and equipment. Instead, the AG helps increase the awareness, confidence, trust and assurance necessary to facilitate the trade of these items for peaceful uses.

Key outcomes

5. Participants reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening CBW-related counter-proliferation efforts and reiterated that the use of these weapons anywhere, at any time, by anyone, under any circumstances is unacceptable and prohibited under international law.
6. Participants reaffirmed the vital role of the AG in maintaining and enhancing international peace and security and countering the threat of the proliferation of CBWs. This complements the work of the other multilateral export control regimes, including the Nuclear Suppliers Group, the Zangger Committee, the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), 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.

7. 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 of disarmament and the elimination of chemical weapons. Participants expressed and reaffirmed support and appreciation for the OPCW's professionalism, impartiality and integrity and its role investigating and attributing chemical weapons use.
8. Participants noted progress made since the Fifth CWC Review Conference in May 2023. Participants continue to work constructively at the OPCW to advance its important work, such as investigating and attributing chemical weapons use, including in Syria, and fortifying the OPCW governance structure.
9. Participants recalled instances of chemical weapons use over the past decade, including in Syria. In discussion on the Decision [C-28/DEC.12] adopted at the CWC Conference of the States Parties in November 2023, Participants discussed the importance of progressing the implementation of measures to prohibit and prevent the transfer of toxic chemicals to Syria. Participants noted the release in February 2024 of the fourth OPCW Investigation and Identification Team's (IIT) report into chemical weapon use in Syria. They re-emphasised that the use of chemical weapons by States or non-State actors is not acceptable under any circumstances. Participants urged Syria to fully cooperate with the OPCW Technical Secretariat.
10. Participants continued to express concern regarding the use of chemical warfare agents against individuals. Participants recalled with sadness the death of Russian opposition figure Alexei Navalny in February 2024. They noted his passing heightened the focus on the circumstances around his poisoning using a Novichok nerve agent in August 2020. They recalled the use of a Novichok nerve agent in Salisbury, United Kingdom in 2018, and the death of Dawn Sturgess, a British national, exposed to a Novichok agent in Amesbury. Participants also recalled the death of Kim Jong-nam in 2017 who was poisoned with a nerve agent.
11. Participants discussed concerns about CBW proliferation activities in a number of countries including Iran, North Korea and Syria.
12. Participants expressed their concern that the mandate of the Panel of Experts of the 1718 Committee of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) was not extended because of a veto by Russia as a Permanent Member of the UNSC. The Panel had provided valuable information and assistance in response to North Korea's WMD program including CBW.
13. 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.

14. Participants underscored their continuing strong and unequivocal support for the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC). Participants voiced their continued support for and welcomed progress made in the recently formed BWC Working Group towards strengthening the Convention. Participants welcomed the update from the Chair of the Working Group, H.E. Ambassador Flávio Soares Damico, on the group's work. Participants looked forward to the development of two new mechanisms, one on international cooperation and assistance and one on scientific and technological developments, and constructive progress on the other items on the agenda of the Working Group, including promoting transparency, enhancing implementation of biosecurity measures, and compliance and verification.
15. 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 strongly condemned the threat by Russia to use chemical and biological weapons and attacks at and in the vicinity of civil biological and chemical facilities in Ukraine. Participants noted the OPCW statement on 7 May 2024 which said that the situation in Ukraine remains volatile and extremely concerning regarding the possible re-emergence of use of toxic chemicals as weapons. Participants discussed their actions to tighten controls on exports of sensitive dual-use goods and technologies in this regard, mentioned some national restrictive measures and explored ways to further coordinate activities in furtherance of non-proliferation objectives. Participants strongly condemned Russia's unsubstantiated claims about chemical and biological weapons, including claims against Ukraine and the United States, both AG Participants.
16. 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.
17. Participants recalled their support for UNSC Resolution 1540, and its subsequent resolutions, in countering proliferation threats from non-state actors, including for terrorist purposes, and welcomed the extension of its mandate. They recognised the important work of the 1540 Committee and Group of Experts. They welcomed the recent appointment of new Experts and looked forward to productive capacity-building events to support UNSC Resolution 1540 implementation.
18. 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 to combat the proliferation of WMD, including through exchanging information, coordinating action, and delivering capacity-building assistance to prevent, detect and respond to chemical and biological warfare threats.

Technical issues

19. AG licensing and enforcement experts exchanged experiences, case studies 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 and focusing on proliferation networks was also discussed. Participants agreed on the importance of the AG's no-undercut policy and denials processes in preventing CBW proliferation.
20. 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 dual-use research of concern, advances in synthetic chemistry, DNA synthesis, artificial intelligence and automation.
21. Noting the AG's Common 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 to the AG's Common Control Lists in response to emerging threats. Participants updated the Factors for Consideration (FFC) for assessing the inclusion, modification, or removal of items on the AG's Common Control Lists, to ensure that the lists remain relevant, appropriate and enforceable, and able to adapt to emerging agents, precursors, equipment and technologies that enable CBW development and use.
22. Updated Common Control Lists, a description of the FFCs and the AG Guidelines are available at www.australiagroup.net.

Outreach

23. Participants agreed to continue an active program of outreach to, and engagement with, non-participants, including those which incorporate AG controls into their national export control frameworks, to promote the value and role of the AG. To further enhance efforts to prevent CBW proliferation and raise awareness of the positive contribution of the AG to international peace and security, Participants agreed to continue to engage other international institutions, academia and industry. Participants noted the importance of such outreach to facilitate the wider adoption of AG Common Control Lists and practices, and to support participation in the AG. Participants welcomed the outreach from the AG Chair and Secretariat, including at the Asian Export Control Seminar in Tokyo in February 2024, as well as the opportunity to interact with those attending the outreach session at the AG Intersessional meeting in Berlin in January 2024.

24. At the invitation of the Secretariat, guest speakers addressed the Plenary. Participants thanked the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime for its presentation on the international legal framework against chemical and biological terrorism and the European Export Control Association for Research Organisations for its presentation on item classification in a research setting. Participants also thanked INTERPOL for presenting on the evolving threat landscape related to chemicals and explosives.

Membership and Adherence

25. Participants affirmed the importance of the Group's diverse membership. Participants welcomed current and potential future membership applications and undertook to engage with interested applicants further.
26. Participants reaffirmed their commitment to encouraging declarations of adherence and the importance of adoption of AG Guidelines and Common 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.
27. Participants looked forward to further engagement with countries potentially interested in unilateral adherence.

Next Intersessional and 40th Anniversary Plenary

28. Participants thanked France for its hosting of the 2024 AG Plenary meeting in Paris. Participants underscored the importance of the AG Plenary meeting in 2025 to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the AG and the AG's lengthy contribution to countering CBW proliferation. Participants noted that 2025 will also mark the 50th anniversary of the entry into force of the BWC, and the 100th anniversary of the signing of the Geneva Protocol (for the Prohibition of the Use in War of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or other Gases, and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare).
29. Participants thanked Germany for its hosting of the AG Intersessional meeting in Berlin from 29 January to 2 February 2024. Participants welcomed Romania as host of the 2025 AG Intersessional meeting, which will be held in Bucharest on 29 to 31 January 2025. Participants reiterated the value of meeting intersessionally as an important opportunity to monitor progress on decisions including related to items on AG Common Control Lists, share technical information, and conduct outreach.
30. Further information on the Australia Group is available at www.australiagroup.net.