**Human Rights Council – 39th Session**

**Interactive Dialogue with the Commission of Inquiry on Syria**

**17 September 2018**

**Australian Statement**

Australia thanks the Commission of Inquiry for its detailed report. We strongly condemn the widespread, systematic and ongoing human rights violations and abuses in Syria.

International humanitarian law is clear – deliberate, indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks on civilians may amount to war crimes, as documented in the Commission’s report.

The repeated use of chemical weapons is a dark legacy of shame for the Syrian authorities and their backers. Australia is gravely concerned at the Commission of Inquiry’s preliminary findings suggesting chlorine was used in the 7 April aerial attack on Douma. The use of chemical weapons is illegal and morally abhorrent. Those responsible must be identified and held to account.

Australia shares fears that a regime offensive in Idlib could have catastrophic humanitarian consequences. The situation underscores the immediate need for a political solution and a comprehensive nation-wide ceasefire. We call on all parties to engage in genuine dialogue to bring the conflict to an end.

Humanitarian access must be provided to all areas, including those recently coming under the control of Syrian authorities. Safe passage must also be provided for those who wish to leave conflict-affected areas.

The situation of refugees in neighbouring countries continues to be difficult and we recognise the significant role played by Syria’s neighbours in hosting displaced people. Any returns must be safe, voluntary and dignified, and people’s property rights respected.

Australia is interested to hear about the Commission’s investigation plan for responding to a potential escalation of hostilities in Idlib.

*Word count: 245 words*