Statement by the Chair of the 2022 Australia Group Plenary

8 July 2022

1. The Australia Group (AG), comprising 42 countries and the European Union, met for the 35th Australia Group Plenary in Paris from 4 to 8 July 2022 – the first in-person Plenary since 2019.

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.

3. Participants noted and appreciated the innovative ways the regime was able to continue its important work despite the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key outcomes

4. Participants reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening chemical and biological weapons-related counter-proliferation efforts.

5. Participants agreed that this 25th anniversary year of the entry into force of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and 50th anniversary of the opening for signature of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) was a timely opportunity to further strengthen global endeavours to rid the world of chemical and biological weapons once and for all. Despite some significant progress under these Conventions, the world continues to face a persistent threat from chemical and biological weapons. Participants agreed the use of these weapons anywhere, at any time, by anyone, under any circumstances was unacceptable and prohibited under international law.

6. Participants recalled instances of chemical weapons use over the past decade, including in Syria, and expressed concern at the use of chemical weapon agents against individuals. Participants recalled that 8 July marked the anniversary of the death of Dawn Sturgess, a British national, poisoned by a Novichok nerve agent in Amesbury, UK. Participants called for a thorough and transparent investigation into the poisoning of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny with a Novichok nerve agent in August 2020. Participants also discussed concerns about chemical and biological proliferation activities in other countries including Iran and North Korea.

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

8. Participants recommitted to respect fully their obligations under international law to not develop, produce or use chemical weapons, and to fully declare and completely destroy any legacy chemical weapon programs. Participants agreed 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.

9. Participants stressed the importance of working towards a meaningful BTWC Review Conference scheduled for November-December 2022 and CWC Review Conference in May 2023, including by highlighting the critical role that effective export controls and the AG play in fulfilling the Conventions' objectives. Participants noted the upcoming BTWC Review Conference offered an opportunity to reaffirm the global norm against biological weapons and to adopt proposals to strengthen the Convention.

10. Recalling UNGA Resolution A/RES/ES-11/1, which deplored in the strongest terms the aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine in violation of Article 2(4) of the United Nations Charter, 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 expressed concern over Russia's unsubstantiated claims about chemical and biological weapons, including claims against Ukraine and the United States who are AG Participants.

11. Partners 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.

12. Participants supported a cooperative approach to strengthening existing non-proliferation arrangements while continuing to facilitate legitimate trade. Export control regimes provide the confidence, trust and assurance necessary to make possible cooperation and legitimate international trade involving sensitive dual-use items.

13. In this regard, Participants reaffirmed the central role of the AG in enhancing and maintaining international peace and security and countering the threat of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), 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 WMD capabilities.

14. Partners recognised the important work of the Committee established pursuant to United Nations Security Council Resolution 1540 in assisting States to meet their non-proliferation and export control obligations under the Resolution. Participants were briefed on 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, noting not all AG Participants are members of these. 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

15. 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.

16. Participants stressed the importance of preventing unauthorised intangible technology transfers (ITT). Participants shared best practices and experiences, including by collaboration to develop and implement tools to appropriately manage ITT risks, and to inform industry and academia about them.

17. Participants shared approaches for keeping pace with rapidly evolving dual-use technologies. Participants discussed new and evolving technologies such as synthetic biology and novel delivery systems, and the relevance of these developments for non-proliferation and export controls.

18. Noting the AG's control lists are 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 the addition of new items to the AG's control lists in response to emerging threats and the removal of items where they were no longer appropriate.

19. Updated Control Lists and the AG Guidelines are available at https://www.australiagroup.net

Outreach

20. Participants agreed to continue an active program of outreach and engagement to non-participants to further enhance efforts to prevent the proliferation of chemical and biological weapons, to build understanding of the role and value of the AG and to facilitate the wider adoption of AG control lists and practices. Noting the impact COVID-19 border closures have had on these efforts, Participants agreed on the importance of resuming face-to-face engagement, led by the Chair and supported by other participants.

21. Participants reinforced the value of engagement with and outreach to industry and academia for enhancing understanding of the impact and pace of new scientific and technological developments.

Adherence

22. 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 transhipment hubs.

23. Participants welcomed Chile's intention to adhere to AG controls and guidelines and looked forward to further engagement with Chile and others interested in unilateral adherence.

Next Intersessional and Plenary

24. Participants agreed on the value of an intersessional meeting to be conducted before the next Plenary and accepted with thanks Italy's offer to host an intersessional meeting in early 2023.

25. Participants accepted France's offer to host the next AG Plenary in Paris later in 2023.

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