Mr Chairman,

Events this year have provided another graphic reminder of the very real threat to global and regional peace and security posed by weapons of mass destruction. We have been reminded why the international community must remain steadfast in countering the proliferation of chemical and biological weapons - and why we must remain resolute that there are no circumstances justifying the use of such weapons.

Mr Chairman,

Australia is committed to working with others to uphold the strength and integrity of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). As a member of the UN Security Council, Australia is seeking to hold to account States for non-compliance with the CWC.

Australia stood with many other countries in expressing our deep concern and alarm over the abhorrent use of chemical weapons in Syria.

The system of international law embodied in the UN Charter must work to ensure such calamities do not happen again, and that perpetrators of such attacks do not escape justice.

The latest report by the Fact-Finding Mission of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) again confirms that a toxic chemical was used as a weapon, systematically and repeatedly, in Syria.

Investigating the attacks that occurred in Northern Syria, in April, May and August of this year, the report finds with a high degree of confidence that chlorine was used against innocent civilians.

The findings that chlorine bombs were deployed by helicopters, which are used only by the Syrian regime in the current conflict, highlights Damascus’ culpability.
The Australian Government is deeply disturbed by these findings which constitute a breach of both the CWC and UN Security Council resolution 2118 (2013). We must confront this matter head on to uphold the credibility of the treaty and the UN Security Council.

The Australian Government has provided $2 million toward the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons and remaining production facilities as a concrete example of our commitment to rid the world of all chemical weapon programs.

Australia joins our international partners in condemning the Syrian regime's brutality towards its own citizens, and its disregard for international disarmament, international humanitarian and human rights law; and has contributed $130 million in humanitarian assistance to the Syrian people.

Mr Chairman,

Turning to the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC), this important instrument not only underpins the international norms against biological weapons, but also facilitates global efforts to promote peaceful use of the life sciences.

Rapid advances in biosciences and biotechnology continue to make the pursuit of a biological weapons program ever more feasible for a growing number of countries, if they were to decide on such a regrettable course.

Against this background, Australia, as Chair of the Western Group, remains committed to strengthening the Convention, including building up common understandings and effective action in relation to the intersessional program. We also remain committed to working to achieve a successful BWC Review Conference in 2016.

Mr Chairman,

Regional exchanges and cooperative efforts make an increasingly important contribution to multilateral efforts to counter the proliferation of biological and chemical weapons. In this regard, Australia plays a particularly active role in the Asia-Pacific. During 2013 and 2014, we were pleased to join regional partners participating in workshops organised by the OPCW. These workshops aimed at building the capacity of regional countries to respond to major chemical incidents and strengthen implementation of the CWC.

Mr Chairman,

We chair the Australia Group, a cooperative and voluntary group which strengthens global security by making it harder and more expensive for would-be proliferators to obtain the dual-use materials, equipment and technology sought to develop chemical or biological weapons. The Australia Group common guidelines and export control lists provide an international benchmark to help all UN Member States fulfil their obligations under UN Security Council Resolution 1540 and other related Resolutions. This resolution remains paramount to combatting the challenge of WMD proliferation. Full
implementation by UN Member States of Resolution 1540 remains an enduring international security priority.

The Australia Group seeks to prevent the acquisition of chemical and biological weapons by extremists – a key component of UNSCR 1540. The Group has also been working to highlight the chemical weapons threat in Syria, and to encourage all countries to intensify scrutiny of exports to Syria to ensure they do not contribute to that threat.

Thank you.