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CHEMICAL AND BACTERIOLOGICAL (BIOLOGICAL) WEAPONS

Letter dated 17 October 1989 from the Permanent Representative of
Australia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

The Australian Government convened at Canberra from 2 to 4 August 1989 a Chemical Weapons Regional Seminar. The Seminar was attended by representatives from a total of 21 countries from the South Pacific and South-East Asia. A list of these countries, together with an information paper on the initiative, the **opening** statement by the Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Senator The **Hon.** Gareth Evans, **Q.C.**, and the Seminar Chairman's summary are attached (see annexes).

The principal aim of the Seminar was to increase support in the region - which is at present free of chemical weapons - for the early conclusion of a chemical weapons convention. Participants discussed recent developments in the Geneva negotiations and considered the implications of the convention both for their own countries and the region as a whole.

In view of the relevance of the Seminar to the General Assembly's consideration of the issues of chemical and bacteriological (biological) weapons, I would ask that this letter and its attachments be circulated as a document of the forty-fourth session of the General Assembly, under item 62 of its agenda.

Annex I

CHEMICAL WEAPONS **REGIONAL** SEMINAR, CANBERRA, 2-4 AUGUST 1989

Participants

Australia

Brunei **Darussalam**

Cook Islands

Federated States of Micronesia

Fiji

Indonesia

Kiribati

Lao People's Democratic Republic

Malaysia

Marshall Islands

Myanmar

Nauru

New Zealand

Papua New **Guinea**

Philippines

Singapore

Solomon Islands

Thailand

Tonga

Tuvalu

Vanuatu

Viet Nam

South **Pacific Forum**

Annex II

AUSTRALIA'S REGIONAL INITIATIVE ON CHEMICAL WEAPONS

Information paper

Chemical warfare

The use in combat of poisonous gases, such as nerve gases and mustard gas, has come to be known as a **chemical** warfare. Weapons used in chemical warfare may be shells, bombs, grenades or missiles designed to disperse lethal chemicals **on** impact. Such chemical weapons were first used on a large-scale in 1915 near Ypres in Belgium, and subsequently took many thousands of casualties on both sides in the First World War. World-wide revulsion at the effects of these weapons, and a desire that chemical warfare should never recur, led to the signing **of** the 1925 Geneva Protocol **for** the Prohibition of the Use in War of Asphyxiating, Poisonous **or** Other Gases, and **of** Bacteriological Methods of Warfare, **a/** which banned the use of poison gas in warfare.

The moral and legal prohibition against chemical warfare remained largely intact since then, although some chemical weapons usage has been reported, for instance, in Abyssinia, Manchuria and the Yemen. The constraints against chemical warfare held back both sides from using chemical weapons in the Second World War, even though both sides held large stocks of such weapons. In fact, the first large-scale, intensive use **of** chemical weapons since 1918 was in the Gulf **War**, between 1983 and 1988, when poison gas attacks claimed thousands of victims from both the Islamic Republic of Iran and Iraq.

The sudden, extensive reappearance of chemical weapons in the Gulf theatre has led to concern that other countries in regions **of** tension will look at arming themselves with chemical weapons. In Australia's view, this would be to learn the **wrong** lesson from the Islamic Republic **of** Iran-Iraq war. Although chemical weapons are technologically simple and relatively easy and cheap to make, they are unpredictable and of little military value. Defence against chemical weapons, even for the troops deploying such munitions, is very expensive and practically impossible in warm environments. They are a form of military terrorism which could be dangerously destabilising, and not a suitable component of a nation's arsenal calculated to defend national security. Australia also strongly believes that chemical warfare is entirely inhumane and beyond the limits of what the international community can accept; chemical weapons inflict hideous injury, causing lingering and painful deaths, and **in** a random, indiscriminate manner which (as was seen in Iraq) can affect defenceless civilians and the attacking army's own troops just as much as a hostile army's troops.

A regional initiative

In an address to the Asia Society in New York in June 1988, Prime Minister Hawke announced that Australia would embark on a regional initiative on chemical weapons. Since then, a team of Australian experts has held

talks on chemical weapons issues in most South Pacific and South-East Asian capitals. The aim has been to promote a **regional** dialogue on chemical weapons issues, **leading** to a firm consensus that we are all more secure without chemical weapons in the region. The introduction or retention of chemical weapons **by any** one country would diminish that country's security, as well as the security of all neighbouring countries.

The chemical **weapons** convention

The discussions have focused on the chemical weapons convention under negotiation by the Geneva Conference on Disarmament. Australia believes that the only fully effective way of dealing with the problem of chemical weapons, and keeping them from our region, is the early implementation of a comprehensive, world-wide ban, such as is being developed at Geneva. Broader understanding **of** this convention, and support for its aims, will be necessary to ensure its early, widespread entry into force. Therefore it is essential that the convention and its implications are well understood and prepared for beyond the Conference on Disarmament's membership and its observers.

Australia is one of the 40 members of the Conference on Disarmament and is actively working for the completion of the convention. Australia therefore sees it has a useful role in co-operating with its neighbours towards a wider acceptance **of** the convention as it **nears** readiness for signature, and acting as a conduit for particular concerns regional Governments may have about the evolving convention.

The region's reactions

The regional initiative team has been received warmly and attentively by regional Governments, and the Australian Government is reassured by the developing consensus within the region that our common well-being would be very considerably served by adherence to a comprehensive global ban on chemical weapons. **There** is a general willingness to participate in an active working dialogue throughout the region **for** the greater benefit to our shared security interests.

A regional seminar

The Australian Government is eager to pursue a continuing dialogue with our neighbours, both to further regional understanding of the issues and to cement the growing regional consensus on chemical weapons issues. This dialogue could also work towards ensuring that any regional concerns about the proposed chemical weapons convention are fully addressed. With this in mind, the Australian Government invited regional Governments to attend a seminar on chemical weapons issues held at Canberra from 2 to 4 August this year. The Seminar provided an opportunity for informal, **more** detailed discussion of chemical weapons issues and the chemical weapons convention, including its implications for the region. Particular **concerns** which countries in the region have about the convention **and** what it means for them were also followed up.

The next step

Australia has no prescription for how to continue the initiative. An this **is** an exercise in co-operative dialogue, we **will** be developing the initiative in close concert with our neighbours. Full emphasis will continue to lie on the **chemical weapons** convention **as** it moves towards **completion**.

Notes

a/ **League of Nations, Treaty Series**, vol. XCIV (1929), No. 2138.

Annex III

ADDRESS **BY** THE MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND TRADE,
SENATOR THE HON. GARETH EVANS, Q.C.

3 August 1989

It **gives** me great pleasure to welcome you to this two-day Seminar aimed at continuing our dialogue on the important issue of chemical weapons.

It is a **source** of great encouragement to me and to the Australian Government that so many of the independent States of South-East Asia and the South Pacific have agreed to be represented at **this** Seminar, and that they have chosen such distinguished representatives for the task,

It is also pleasing that this gathering represents yet another element in **the** expanding inventory of co-operation and dialogue in this part of the Asia-Pacific region.

There are many urgent problems affecting our region. Our Governments have to give attention to all of them. Why, against this background, do we also have to **devote resources** to chemical **weapons** issues when none of us have them in our **armouries**?

There are, I **believe**, two principal answers. The fact in that the recent sudden reappearance of chemical weapons jars with what otherwise is one of the **greatest** periods of hope mankind has faced for many years.

The extensive use of chemical weapons in the Islamic Republic of Iran-Iraq **war** should concern us all greatly. For it is now more conceivable that other countries faced with threats to their **security** will look at arming themselves with these weapons. In our view, this would be a disastrous **mistake** on grounds of both strategic self-interest and morality. Although chemical **weapons** are technologically simple and relatively easy and cheap to make, they are unpredictable and, at the end of the day, of dubious military value. **De fenco** against chemical weapons, even for the troops deploying such munitions, is **very** expensive and practically impossible, particularly in warm environments. **Their** use is, in a sense, a form of military terrorism which is dangerously **destabilizing**, and does not, **on** any rational analysis, contribute to a nation's security.

In **this** context, I believe it is significant that even during the Second World War, both sides decided not to use the large stocks of chemical weapons at their disposal. This **was** because leaders and Generals worried that the consequences of: their **use** - including retaliation in kind - were too unpredictable.

The second factor behind our policy is our strong belief that chemical **warfare** is entirely inhumane and beyond the limits of what the **inter** national community can accept, even in the desperate circumstances of all-out military conflict. **Chemical** weapons inflict hideous injury, causing lingering and painful death, and in a

random, indiscriminate manner which (as was seen in the Islamic Republic of Iran-Iraq war) can **affec** defenceless civilians and the attacking army's own troops, just as much as the enemy.

I would add that many Australian:, feel a direct. and persona? sense of revulsion against chemical weapons because of the experience of their own **families**. Indeed, close relations of both sides **of my** own family, like many other thousands of Australian servicemen, suffered the terrible experience of **gas** attack during the First World War.

Australia's central concern is that chemical **weapons**, which are now **largely irrelevant** to **this** region, must remain that way. The best. means to that end, in our view, is for the early conclusion of a chemical weapons convention, which would han all such **weapons** for all time.

The negotiations towards such a convention have been proceeding **for** many years. Like others, we **have** been frustrated by their **slowness**. **Recently**, however, largely due to the lessening of super-Power tensions, considerable proyyress has **been** made. There **is now greater** hope that a convention maybe concluded in the next Sew years. Australia, like our colleagues from **Indonesia** and Myanmar, is a member of the Conference on Disarmament, and is doing **all** in its power to hasten **progress** towards the **finalization of** a convention.

Outside the Conference **on** Disarmament, Australia has **been** active on a number of distinct yet interrelated fronts to maximise progress towards a convention. One front is our organisation of a Government-Industry Conference against Chemical Weapons, to be held **in** Canberra in September this year. **A** number of your countries will be represented at that Conference as we **ll**.

We are convening the Conference in recognition of the important role that the **international** chemical industry will have in ensuring **the** successful conclusion and implementation of **an** effectively verifiable **comprehensive** ban on chemical weapons.

This Seminar, however, is a quite separate **exercise** and **the** latest step in the Prime Minister's **Regional Initiative** on Chemical Weapons, the aim of which has been **to promote greater regional** awareness of, and dialogue on, this issue. This will **lead, we** hope, to a firm consensus **that we are all** more secure without. chemical weapons.

Over the next two days, **we** will have an opportunity t.o discuss many angles of the chomikai weapons problem. In line with our hopes for the Regional Initiative, .it would be our wish that out of these discussions will **emerge** not only a deeper awareness of the importance of this issue, and how it. could **affect** our region, but **a consensus that these** weapons **aren**horront. and **that** we should **all** support the early conclusion of a convent-ion t.o hasten their **prohibition**.

The discussions you will have here will **enable** you t.o be better informed of **the content** of the convention, and the rights and obligations of Governments which accede to it. My own Government, fully **expects to be** able to **sign the convention** as soon as it. is **completed**, and it is my hope that as the negotiations progress you

will be able to keep your ministers well informed, so that your Governments will also be able to adhere rapidly to it.

In expressing this hope, I am not overlooking the fact that a number of your Governments already have stated their support for such a position. Our wish would be that all States in this region, including those which have not until now had the opportunity to examine closely chemical weapons issues, should join in a consensus by agreeing to the position already arrived at by others.

It is my Government's firm belief that, on the whole question of chemical weapons, the countries of our region, by taking joint action, can influence events in ways which will contribute to the security of us all. A collective position stated by us all will encourage other regions of the world to emulate us and bring forward the time when the chemical weapons convention is achieved.

That, I firmly believe, must be our objective, and indeed it is the coming into effect of that convention which must be the aim and conclusions of this exercise in which we are now engaged.

Once again, I would like to welcome you all warmly to this Seminar in which we look forward to a full but informal exchange of ideas. I would stress in this context that we are treating our meeting as in-house between Governments, and all statements will be treated by us as strictly confidential.

I trust that when you have all returned to your warmer climes you will look back on this gathering as both a worthwhile as well as, I hope, enjoyable, exercise. I now have much pleasure in declaring the Seminar open.

Annex IV

CHAIRMAN'S SUMMARY

1. Sixty-seven delegates from 23 nations in the South-East. Asian and South Pacific region attended the Seminar, the first multilateral meeting of officials from this region aimed at discussing the chemical **weapons** problem. Discussion was informal and free-ranging, enabling differing perspectives on the issue to be shared, but the Seminar was clearly united by a concern that the region should be spared the threat of chemical **warfare**, and by a shared desire to see a comprehensive, enduring bar on chemical weapons. Papers delivered to the Seminar dealt with the proposed chemical weapons convention, its consequences and strategic benefits for the region, **and** particular aspects such as verification, assistance and State's obligations: the chemical industry's role in securing and supporting a convention: the proliferation of chemical weapons; and the regional response to the chemical weapons threat.

Chemical weapons convention

2. The chemical weapons convention under negotiation by the Geneva Conference on Disarmament formed the focus of discussions. Participants considered several papers dealing in detail with the issues to be resolved in the negotiations on the convention's "rolling text". Strong support was expressed for the convention's aim to provide a total, verifiable ban on chemical weapons, Some concerns were registered about the slow pace of the Geneva negotiations and there were **some** doubts about the resolve of **major** negotiators to see an early, successful conclusion to the talks. It was pointed out that although there had been reasons to doubt the general political will for a convention in the past, the indications were now very positive. Negotiators were proceeding cautiously because the **remaining** issues were detailed and technical, all the major conceptual issues having been resolved. The prospects for conclusion of an effective convention **were** strong.

3. The importance of universal adherence to the convention was stressed, as the convention would be effective only if there were no **significant** nations or **groups** of nations outside its reach. Adherence to the convention would have strategic and security benefits for each nation, and **wide adherence** would send a strong positive political signal. Comprehensive adherence would create a fruitful moral climate with more wide-reaching benefits.

Strategic aspects

4. It was noted that the region had much to gain from remaining free of chemical armaments: for instance the cost of **effective defence** against chemical attack was **extremely** high, and absolutely **prohibitive** for many regional States; the questionable military advantages of chemical weapons stocks **are** entirely outweighed by **their** military and strategic **costs**; a burgeoning **chemical arms** race would

inflict heavy economic and developmental cost on any nations involved. Moreover, the greater availability of cheaper ballistic missile.³ which could be equipped with chemical warheads meant that no regional State could afford the luxury of complacency regarding its future security from chemical attack. The proposed **chemical** weapons convention was identified as the most effective way of bringing about **those** benefits for the region. This convention would also have a strong confidence-building effect, within the region and beyond it.

5. Some participants remarked that the problem of chemical weapons seemed remote to the region; it was pointed out that this position could rapidly change, and it was important to take steps while the problem was manageable.

Regional concerns

6. Participants paid particular attention to the obligations that States **would** undertake in becoming parties to **the** convention. A concern expressed on behalf of a number of countries in the region was that, in spite of their strong political and **morals support** for the convention, they would not be able to **devote** significant resources either to following the chemical weapons issue or to **undertaking** the obligations of adherence to the convention. The architects of the convention would clearly need to bear this in mind when settling funding arrangements and when determining the obligations of those States with small or non-existent chemical industries, or with few financial or other resources to set aside. One **suggestion** was that there should be provision for such a country to enter a nil return when the size of its industry or use of toxic **chemicals** fell below a certain threshold.

7. It was stressed that the convention **was**, in danger of becoming meaningless if it imposed obligations on small or developing countries that they were incapable of implementing. It was pointed out, none the less, that all countries in the region stood to gain a great deal from an effective convention, and should **be** ready to support it actively.

8. It was felt that the convention should make provision for **assistance** in the disposal of chemical weapons dumps found in developing **countries**, and assistance with the **maintenance** of appropriate defence against chemical warfare.

9. The likely impact of the convention on industry's competitiveness was discussed. It was acknowledged that verification would place some burden on industry, but this could be **harmonized** with existing monitoring and reporting **requirements** to minimize its extra impact. Dialogue with industry would be essential to ensure that verification was effective and at minimal **cost**.

Further dialogue

10. A **clear** need was identified to **continue** consultation and dialogue on **chemical weapons** within the region, particularly as the Geneva talks moved **towards** concluding the chemical weapons convention. Among proposals discussed was a **further** seminar, to discuss **developments** in chemical weapons issues and to act as a forum

for the concerns and interests of regional countries. There was some **interest** in the possibility of taking part in a **trial inspection of a relevant** chemical plant. A suggestion was made that regional Governments formally express their **opposition** to chemical weapons and their support for a total ban and the idea of a **joint regional statement** was discussed.
