

PRESS RELEASE ISSUED BY THE AUSTRALIAN FOREIGN MINISTER  
SENATOR GARETH EVANS ON 7 MARCH 1989

The Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Senator Gareth Evans, announced today that Australia will host a major international Chemical Weapons Conference later this year.

The Conference will bring together Governments and representatives of the international chemical industry to discuss the growing problem of the international trade in feedstocks, plant and equipment which are to be used for chemical weapons purposes.

The initiative follows discussions between Australian and United States officials, and between Senator Evans and the United States Secretary of State, Mr. James Baker, about how best to build on the momentum generated by the Paris Conference on Chemical Weapons in January.

This initiative is being announced simultaneously by Mr. Baker in Vienna today to the Meeting of Foreign Ministers of countries participating in the talks on conventional forces in Europe.

The date of the Conference, and details relating to participation in it, are still to be finalized.

Senator Evans said that for some time Australia had been actively developing measures to address the problem of the spread of chemical weapons. Since 1985, Australia had brought together representatives of industrial nations which export certain relevant chemicals to ensure that their industries were not associated even inadvertently with the production of chemical weapons. This Group, which met regularly in Paris, had now become known as the Australia Group.

In June 1988, Prime Minister Hawke announced the launching of a regional initiative to work co-operatively with our neighbours to prevent the spread of these horrific weapons to our region and, following a recent programme of regional visits by an Australian officials team, a regional seminar is being planned for later this year (with preliminary talks being held last week with Foreign Minister Alatas on the possibility of Indonesia co-hosting it).

Australia is a leading participant in the negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament for a chemical weapons convention which will ban chemical weapons globally for all time.

Australia has had productive dialogue with other Governments and the chemical industry for some time, including as leader of the Australia Group, on how best to advance the objective of preventing the spread of chemical weapons while not impeding the legitimate activities of the civil chemical industry. One clear lesson from these discussions had been the need to work closely with the chemical industry.

Senator Evans praised the collaboration of the Australian industry and its peak councils for their willingness to work with the Government to achieve practical solutions and said that the proposed Conference - designed to bring together Governments and chemical industry representatives in a joint problem-solving dialogue - would benefit from that background of close relations in the host country.