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CANADA

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR SABINE NÖLKE
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF CANADA TO THE OPCW
AT THE EIGHTY-FOURTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Madam Chairperson, Canada is deeply concerned by the Syrian Arab Republic's non-acceptance in January of a notified routine inspection of its Scientific Studies and Research Centre pursuant to this Executive Council's decision in November. With this refusal, the Syrian Arab Republic continues to establish new, negative precedents as a State Party to the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Particularly troubling is the Syrian Arab Republic's explanation that its refusal was necessitated by the security situation in northern Damascus. Clearance had already been granted by the United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) for the team. In every previous case where a site visit was not possible due to security concerns, UNDSS concurred. This time, the UNDSS assessment stood in stark contrast to the Syrian Arab Republic's. The fact that it took Syrian authorities at least three weeks to produce a detailed explanation for refusing a mandatory OPCW inspection should give all States Parties pause about the real motives behind the cancellation.

While the inspection was finally undertaken last week, the Syrian Arab Republic's respect for the will of the Executive Council bears continued close scrutiny. Canada thanks the Director-General for his regular updates on this matter and for the Technical Secretariat's diligent efforts to ensure the Syrian Arab Republic complies with the decision of the Eighty-Third Session of the Executive Council. We look forward to hearing about the inspection results. We also repeat our call on the Syrian Arab Republic to meet all of its binding legal obligations under EC-83/DEC.5 (dated 11 November 2016), including safe and unfettered access for inspectors to airbases identified by the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM).

Concerning ongoing reports of chemical weapons use in the Syrian Arab Republic, Canada lauds the tireless efforts of the OPCW's Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) to investigate over 75 reported allegations. We have full confidence in the professionalism and judgement of its team leaders and members. Canada takes particular note of the FFM's conclusions released 21 December 2016 that allegations of chemical weapons use levelled by the Syrian Government against armed opposition groups in Aleppo on 2 August 2016 could not be corroborated despite two deployments by the FFM, 25 interviews, a comprehensive document review, and the analysis of environmental samples.



Madam Chairperson, as reported to the Executive Council this morning by our Malaysian colleague, a North Korean citizen was assassinated on 13 February at Kuala Lumpur International Airport using a toxic chemical. Our colleague advised that Malaysian authorities have concluded that the nerve agent VX was used. If confirmed, this would mean a chemical warfare agent was deployed on the territory of a State Party – a direct challenge to our hard-won taboo. We laud Malaysia's cooperation with the OPCW to date and look forward to additional updates as appropriate. We also ask the Technical Secretariat to provide assistance to Malaysia as required, and welcome the cooperation that has already been given.

Canada also looks forward to receiving more information about disturbing reports received from Mosul.

In this context, Canada re-iterates its unreserved support for the Director-General's establishment of a Rapid Response Assistance Mission in May 2016. This measure is provided for in Article X of the Convention and stands to potentially benefit a number of States Parties who may need to request such assistance in the future. Canada remains ready to help. Through our Global Partnership Program, we have been a committed partner to the OPCW, providing almost EUR 19 million since 2012 in voluntary funding to support its mandate to achieve a world free from the threat of chemical weapons use.

Madam Chairperson, Canada remains honoured to be playing a leading role in the Open-Ended Working Group on Future Priorities. My South African Co-Chairperson and I will update Council members under Item 16 on the Working Group's deliberations, but I have some remarks to share in my national capacity on the current segment under discussion, the evolution of the verification regime.

The last four years have seen greater changes in the operating environment and practices of the verification regime than the previous sixteen combined. Remote verification, satellite imagery, and forensic analysis of audio and video footage have proved to be valuable verification tools. Removal and destruction of chemical warfare agents outside the territory of possessor States in international waters or at commercial facilities was unforeseen by Chemical Weapons Convention negotiators but, under stringent OPCW verification, has served chemical disarmament and international security well. The success of new, innovative mechanisms like the JIM and FFM in investigating chemical weapons use is a major achievement which bears witness to the pragmatic adaptability of the Convention and the OPCW.

While routine verification of industry and chemical weapons destruction remains fit for purpose, recent events show that State and non-State actors remain willing and able to develop and use chemical weapons. The Technical Secretariat's analytical and investigative capabilities need to be upgraded, including in the area of chemical forensics to allow for identification of perpetrators.

In this context, Canada welcomes the Director-General's request that the Scientific Advisory Board establish a new temporary working group to explore scientific and technological developments relevant to its investigative work. Moreover, the OPCW Central Analytical Database (OCAD) is incomplete: it will be less useful in Investigations of Alleged Use (IAUs) or Challenge Inspections (CIs) unless expanded to include non-scheduled chemicals, degradation products, synthesis by-products of scheduled chemicals, and Riot Control

Agents. Canada hopes that the Council at this session will be able to adopt the draft decision on new validated data of non-scheduled chemicals for inclusion in OCAD.

Finally, the long-term retention of critical expertise, especially for IAUs and CIs but also for industry verification, must be safeguarded. Canada believes this will require revisiting the current tenure policy. No organisation which wants to sustain successes on complex and technical files forces its most talented and experienced professionals to leave after seven years. This discussion is especially necessary with the Conference of the States Parties slated to review its 2014 decision on rehiring of inspectors (C-19/DEC.11, dated 4 December 2014) in December.

Madam Chairperson, I ask that this statement be made an official document of this meeting of the Executive Council and published on the external server and the public website of the OPCW.

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