



## **STATEMENT OF CANADA TO THE 56<sup>th</sup> MEETING OF THE OPCW EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

**DELIVERED BY AMBASSADOR SABINE NÖLKE, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE**

Mr Chair, Canadians are deeply disturbed by the conclusions of the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) contained in its report of October 26 – namely, that Syrian government forces deployed an aerial bomb containing sarin on April 4 in the southern Idlib town of Khan Shaykhun, and that Daesh fired munitions containing sulphur mustard on Umm Hawsh in September 2016.

Canada restates its condemnation of the Syrian Arab Republic for its continuing breaches of the Chemical Weapons Convention, and both Syria and Daesh for violations of international humanitarian law. This is the fourth time the Assad regime has been found responsible for chemical weapons use – evidence, if any more was needed, of a conscious choice by its senior leadership to ignore its international legal obligations and roll back the global taboo against such weapons.

While conditions sadly do not appear in place for the Security Council to refer this compelling body of evidence to an appropriate judicial mechanism, the JIM's tireless efforts have helped lay the groundwork for future accountability. Canada salutes the professionalism and dedication of its Leadership Panel and staff. Canada will do everything in its power to ensure that the pursuit of justice for victims of these atrocities does not end here. In this context, we note the important role of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Those Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in Syria (IIIM), created last year by the UN General Assembly.

Mr Chair, every member of this Council should be outraged by the JIM's conclusions. It is not enough that the Syrian government was found responsible for using chlorine barrel bombs on at least three occasions in 2014 and 2015. Its military has now been found to have used the very nerve agent it claims to have shipped outside the country for destruction. And just last week, the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission confirmed yet another case of sarin use on March 30, five days before the massacre at Khan Shaykhun. Use requires possession; failure to disclose such possession creates another clear violation of the Convention, namely Syria's failure to be open and honest in its declaration.

As stewards of the Chemical Weapons Convention, Council members must take action on all these breaches. This must start with an unreserved condemnation of the Syrian government for its illegal and indefensible actions, and for not complying with its treaty obligations. Failure to do so will leave the OPCW a permanently diminished organisation, one incapable of defending its foundational tenets.

Canada also calls on this Council to recommend to the Conference of States Parties any and all measures that are within its power under the Convention to address these breaches. Syria has turned its back on the principles for which we all stand. It is Canada's view that they have forfeited the rights and privileges of OPCW membership, and should no longer be permitted to sit among us or participate in this Organisation's full range of activities until the Secretariat has verified that their declaration is accurate and complete. This must include the chemical weapons stockpile and capability it has obviously retained since 2014.



Mr Chair, I wish to take a moment to address, through you, the delegation of the Russian Federation. Russia, like all of us, made a solemn pledge two and half decades ago to uphold the object and purpose of the Chemical Weapons Convention: to exclude completely the possibility of the use of these weapons. Russia demonstrated its deep commitment to these principles just six weeks ago, when it eliminated the last munition from the largest stockpile ever declared under this Convention.

In the wake of the JIM's latest findings, Canada calls on the Russian Federation to demonstrate this commitment once again, by telling its Syrian ally that their behaviour will not be tolerated, and that those officials responsible for deploying these weapons will be held to account. No one accuses Russia itself of playing a role in these attacks. However, as the state with the most influence over the Syrian regime, Russia has a responsibility to guide its actions. Exercising its veto power – by now nine times since 2011, and three times specifically on the issue of chemical weapons use in Syria – in an effort to shield its ally sends a disturbing message.

In closing, Mr Chair, Canada welcomes the Director General's confirmation that the latest FFM report on the Ltamenah attack has been relayed to the JIM. We call on the UN Security Council to renew the latter's mandate beyond November 17 so that responsibility can be attributed for this apparent war crime as well as approximately 60 other confirmed instances of chemical weapons use. As long as credible allegations of chemical weapons use in Syria continue to surface, we expect the FFM to continue its essential work. We also expect its reports to be shared, if requested, with the IIM.

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.