



OPCW

Conference of the States Parties

Fourth Special Session
26 and 27 June 2018

C-SS-4/NAT.31
26 June 2018
ENGLISH and FRENCH only

CANADA

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR SABINE NÖLKE
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF CANADA TO THE OPCW
AT THE FOURTH SPECIAL SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES
PARTIES**

Mr Chairperson, Canada was pleased to be among the eleven states that initially requested that this special session of the Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention be convened. We did so for one very simple reason:

The global norm against the use of chemical weapons, forged in the horror of the gas attacks of World War I, is under threat.

In 1997, when the Convention came into force, we believed these horrendous, inhumane weapons had been declared relics of the twentieth century—that the political will and political consensus existed to end their use, once and for all. However, in the past five years, the taboo against chemical weapons has been repeatedly broken.

Most distressingly, the erosion of this norm has accelerated in the last eighteen months.

Attacks with chemical weapons have now taken place in the Syrian Arab Republic, Iraq, Malaysia, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Such attacks pose a grave threat to the Convention and to the rules-based international order that keeps humanity safe. It is absolutely critical that the competent international institutions—first and foremost this one, where the compact against chemical weapons was enshrined—take action to prevent further violations of the Convention and hold those responsible to account.

Looking around this room, we see the commitment shown by States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention. Today, in response to the challenges I've listed, we are meeting to uphold the global ban against such arms. Over eighty countries called for this meeting, and more are present today for this important discussion and decisional moment than at any Conference in recent memory.

Over the last year and a half, the actions of a few countries have unfortunately prevented us from meaningfully addressing these challenges. One argument frequently given by those who block action at the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) is a preference that it be a “technical body” focused on cooperation and specialised issues rather than the so-called “political issues” relating to the use of chemical weapons. But isn't the reason we are here “for the sake of all mankind, to exclude completely the possibility of the use of chemical weapons,” as the Convention stipulates?



That is a political statement, a policy decision each of our countries undertook when we negotiated, and ultimately ratified, the Convention. That's why we're here. The "P" in OPCW stands for "Prohibition." Let us see that mission through. All the work done by us here at the Conference or in the Executive Council, by the Technical Secretariat, and by inspectors in the field *is* political, done in the service of that goal: a world free of chemical weapons.

It is regrettable that we remain so far from that ultimate goal. Over 96% of the world's declared stockpiles have been destroyed under OPCW verification, including the complete stockpiles of multiple States Parties. And yet, despite assurances that they no longer possess chemical weapons, all evidence suggests that some States Parties have retained some kind of offensive chemical weapons capability.

The OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) concluded that the Assad regime used sarin against its own citizens in Khan Shaykhun on 4 April 2017, and chlorine as a weapon in attacks in Talmenes, Sarmin, and Qmenas in 2015 and 2016. The evidence linking these weapons to government forces is solid, reviewed by skilled independent experts. However, the OPCW Executive Council has been unable to censure the Syrian Arab Republic, and impasse in the United Nations Security Council resulted in the JIM's termination when there was still work for it to do.

It is Canada's hope and expectation that this special session recognises the results of that investigation and respond accordingly. Indeed, we must condemn all instances where chemical weapons are used. This includes the use of sulfur mustard by ISIS in the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq; the use of VX in Kuala Lumpur International Airport; and the use of a military-grade Novichok nerve agent in Salisbury, United Kingdom.

We must also strive to name those responsible for using chemical weapons through whatever mechanisms we have at our disposal. In the absence of the JIM, Canada fully supports the proposal to have the Director-General put in place arrangements to identify perpetrators of chemical attacks in the Syrian Arab Republic. We also support the proposal to have the Director-General offer technical expertise to States Parties, on request, in order to attribute responsibility for chemical attacks on their territory, and to enlist outside experts with appropriate qualifications as necessary.

It has been argued by some States that the OPCW does not have the mandate for attribution. These States should recall Article XII, which stipulates that the Conference of States Parties "shall take the necessary measures... to ensure compliance with this Convention", including collective measures. This special session has the authority to put in place measures at the OPCW to address compliance issues. Period.

Finally, we must highlight the expertise and professionalism displayed time and again by the Technical Secretariat, under the distinguished guidance of the outgoing Director-General. In OPCW missions, and in the context of the JIM, this Organisation's inspectors and investigators have executed their mandates and procedures with discretion and integrity. They have put their lives in danger to seek the truth behind chemical weapons attacks. When certain States reject the OPCW's conclusions by calling into question its working methods, or labelling the findings as "politically motivated", they do nothing but expose their own willingness to allow illegal acts to be carried out with impunity.

Canada has consistently demonstrated its support for the OPCW, not only with words, but with tangible actions. Since 2012, Canada has contributed more than CAD 33 million towards the elimination of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic, Libya, and Iraq, and the enhancement of contingency operations and investigations of chemical weapons use. Building on this track record, I am pleased to announce today on behalf of the Government of Canada a contribution of CAD 7.5 million over three years towards the OPCW's new Centre for Chemistry and Technology.

Canada believes in democracy, fundamental human rights, peace and security, and the international rules-based order that underlies them all. We are proud of our membership in the International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons, and proud to support this Fourth Special Session of the Conference and to sponsor the United Kingdom-led draft decision expressing support and appreciation for the impartial and independent work of the Director-General and the Technical Secretariat to uphold the Convention on all our behalf.

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

- - - 0 - - -