



**STATEMENT OF CANADA TO THE 89<sup>th</sup> SESSION OF THE  
OPCW EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

DELIVERED BY H.E. SABINE NÖLKE, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE

Distinguished Chair,

Let me start by welcoming and congratulating Director General Arias on his appointment to lead the OPCW. As we all know, these are turbulent and challenging times for the Organisation and the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). Please be assured of Canada's full support and confidence in your leadership, in preserving the OPCW's work as the independent, professional, competent and impartial body the States Parties have entrusted with implementing the Convention.

Unfortunately, nothing can be taken for granted in the current context. The Convention and the norms to which we all committed ourselves 21 years ago are not only under threat, but under attack.

Reports of chlorine use in Syria have been frequent, particularly during major regime offensives on opposition-held areas, and the regime's use of sarin in Khan Shaykhun in April 2017 cannot be ignored. These attacks have often resulted in civilian casualties. So while Canada hopes the Russia-Turkey demilitarized zone will bring some relief to the population in Idlib, we remain seriously concerned by a potential Syrian regime-led offensive. Any military campaign could have a disastrous humanitarian impact for the 3 million civilians who are currently in this area. We also fear that the Assad regime may again use chemical weapons against the Syrian people in Idlib, which would constitute a war crime.

Esteemed Chair, the United Kingdom confirmed that the Novichok-class chemical nerve agent used to attack Sergey and Yulia Skripal in Salisbury in March 2018, also killed Dawn Sturgess and injured Charles Rowley in Amesbury in June 2018. This was independently verified by a Technical Assistance Visit of the OPCW, and led to criminal charges brought in August 2018 against two Russian nationals, who are believed to have carried out the attacks on behalf of the Russian Federation; one of the individuals has since been confirmed to be a senior officer in the GRU. The operation was carried out with cavalier disregard for human life, and could have killed many more. Canada is deeply disturbed by the implications.

These and other recent attacks are an egregious violation of the longstanding **norm** against chemical weapons – a method of killing we had allowed ourselves to believe was a barbaric practice of the past. It shows a complete disregard for the international rules-based order that much of the world considers the hallmark of modern international civility.

We are compelled to mention, in this context, the malicious cyber-operation by the Russian military, which Canada joined its allies to expose and denounce. This particular act is part of a broader pattern of activities by the Russian government that lie well outside the bounds of appropriate behaviour, demonstrate a disregard for international law, and undermine the rules-based international order. It is also consistent with Russian efforts to undermine the independence and professionalism of the OPCW and its personnel. We call on the Russian Federation to break this pattern and resume a constructive role in the CWC.



How does one deal in good faith with actors, including States Parties that seem to believe that the rules do not apply to them?

Canada believes you do this by strengthening the implementation of the legal instruments that uphold these rules. We started this important process at the Special Session of the Conference of States Parties in June – namely to pursue **accountability** for chemical weapons use wherever it occurs. While the attribution mechanism we asked OPCW to set up is not invested with judicial powers, it is Canada's hope and expectation that the arrangements launched by the June decision will bring us one step closer to bringing the perpetrators of chemical weapons use to justice.

We will also push to strengthen and modernise the CWC verification regime so that it keeps pace with evolving threats such as those posed by non-state actors and by advances in science and technology, including the development of new chemicals that directly challenge the Convention's object and purpose.

Furthermore, Canada is pleased to co-sponsor with the United States a technical change proposal to amend Schedule 1A of the Annex on Chemicals, which my esteemed American counterpart mentioned in his opening statement. We look forward to discussing this further in closed session under the appropriate agenda item.

Madam Chair, it is essential that as the institution responsible for the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention, the OPCW be empowered and resourced to carry out its critical work, including the attribution mechanism it was tasked with establishing in the June CSP decision. In opening the budget discussions several weeks ago, the Director General painted a bleak picture of the Organisation's unsustainable financial situation, caused in part by states' not paying their assessed contributions – or doing so at the last possible moment in the fiscal year – but also by the increased burden placed on the Technical Secretariat by the developments of the last few years, as well as by newly identified threats, including those I mentioned earlier. While a zero nominal growth policy may have been possible to maintain in previous years' **budgets**, we need to be in a position to back our words with action and ensure that the Technical Secretariat has adequate financial and human resources to carry out and protect its work. This cannot and should not be done through voluntary contributions alone. It has to be a shared investment in this Organisation, which will be under increasing scrutiny for its ability to carry through on the commitments we have made together.

For its part, Canada will continue to walk its talk. Since 2012, Canada has provided more than C\$33 million in voluntary contributions toward the elimination of declared chemical weapons in Syria, Libya, and Iraq, and the enhancement of contingency operations and investigations of alleged use.

In addition, Canada has committed \$7.5 million over three years toward the OPCW's new **Centre for Chemistry and Technology**. I look forward to convening and co-chairing the first meeting of the **Group of Friends of the Laboratory** alongside my distinguished Indonesian counterpart, Ambassador Puja, later this month. The Group will build awareness of the Centre's goals, deadlines, milestones and resource needs; help maintain project momentum; and deepen ownership among States Parties. Any delegation prepared to support the initiative financially or politically is invited to join the Group, and should indicate their interest to the Canadian or Indonesian Delegations, or to the Technical Secretariat.



The voluntary contributions I have mentioned have come from Canada's Weapons Threat Reduction Program, which is charged with implementing Canada's commitments to the 31-country Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction (GP). As 2018 chair of the G7-led Global Partnership, Canada has prioritised support for the OPCW and the Convention. In this regard, I am pleased to note that the Strategic Vision of the GP's Chemical Security Working Group was revised earlier this year, to more explicitly identify tangible ways and means for GP partners to assist and strengthen this Organisation and capacity in states less able to implement their obligations under the Convention.

Madam Chair, Canada's **Feminist Foreign Policy** seeks to promote an equal voice and equal rights for all, to benefit from equal opportunities, and to live in equal safety and security. In our work on chemical weapons disarmament, there is an abysmal disparity in the number of women engaged not only in chemistry and other science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, but also in security policy and programming. In this regard, my government has announced renewed commitments to implementing the Women, Peace and Security agenda, including through appointing a Canadian Ambassador for Women, Peace and Security. Beyond the issue of gender representation, we must also understand that there are differential gendered impacts of the threat and use of chemical weapons and indeed, of our prevention and capacity-building efforts. Without a more sophisticated gender-informed perspective, our risk analysis, our needs assessments, and our results-based management frameworks are missing an important part of the equation. It requires leadership and training to better understand how to apply a gender lens to issues related to weapons of mass destruction. We believe that a gendered analysis is integral to increasing our understanding of threat and the effectiveness of our responses. Therefore, Canada now requires a gender-based analysis of all of our disarmament programming – and indeed all of our international security programming.

In this vein, I wish to commend Director General Arias for his leadership and commitment to improving not only proportional geographic representation, but also gender representation, in the staffing practices of the OPCW. Canada fully supports you in this endeavour and will look forward to progress updates on this initiative. In particular, we welcome your willingness to become an International Gender Champion.

As we approach the upcoming back-to-back Conference of States Parties and Fourth Review Conference, our reflections on the past five years demonstrate a great many successes in the face of a very sobering reality. The community that supports this Convention and the OPCW can feel a sense of accomplishment in the resilience it has demonstrated in responding to the crisis that started in 2013 and has deepened over the past few years, with increasing numbers of chemical weapons attacks, across a number of regions of the world, by States Parties, States not Party and non-state actors. In this regard, I hope that the work we all carried out in the **Open-Ended Working Group on Future Priorities** will be well-reflected in the steps we resolve to take to uphold the letter of the Convention.

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