



OPCW

Executive Council

Ninetieth Session
12 – 15 March 2019

EC-90/NAT.14
12 March 2019
ENGLISH and FRENCH only

CANADA

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

Distinguished Chair,

This session of the Executive Council (“the Council”) begins days after the OPCW Technical Secretariat (“the Secretariat”) released its final report on the Fact-Finding Mission’s investigation into allegations of chemical weapons use in the city of Douma almost one year ago. Canada is deeply concerned by the finding that there are reasonable grounds to conclude that molecular chlorine was used as a weapon in Douma.

It took time to reach these conclusions. Let me start by recognising the meticulous and painstaking work undertaken by the FFM and commend the continued professionalism, impartiality, integrity, and analytical rigour demonstrated by the Secretariat in this difficult and sensitive task.

We expect that the FFM’s work on the Douma case will be referred to the Investigation and Identification Team, once it begins its activities. Those responsible must be held accountable, and the work of this team will be an important step in that direction.

Esteemed Chair, it has been more than a year since the attempted assassination of Sergei and Yulia Skripal with a deadly Novichok-class chemical nerve agent. But it was only on 1 March 2019 that the town of Salisbury was declared fully decontaminated. The considerable time and resources required to eliminate the Novichok agent from the environment shows just how dangerous and enduring these chemicals are, and underlines our common interest in ensuring that they are never used again. This is why Canada joined the Netherlands and the United States in putting forward a proposal to add these chemicals to Schedule 1-A of the Chemical Weapons Convention (“the Convention”). We were pleased that this proposal was recommended by the Council in January for adoption.

It is also why we supported four of the proposals put forward by the Russian Federation for addition to Schedule 1 a few weeks later. We were unable to accept the fifth category of chemicals proposed by Russia since they - according to both the Secretariat, and our own National Authority - did not meet the definition of a Schedule 1 chemical. Through extensive direct consultations with the Russian delegation, we made clear that there was a path to consensus. Instead, the Russian Federation chose to proceed with a decision that it knew would fail. The reasons for this approach are now clear. In the hours and days that followed, Russia used the rejection of its proposal as grounds for a systematic campaign of



disinformation, fabricating allegations that states had objected to the fifth proposal as a cover-up for their own research on the chemicals in question. We can only assume that this had been the intention all along.

This is just the latest example of deliberate Russian disinformation. For the past year, we have heard them echo the nonsensical claims of the Syrian regime that the Douma attack was staged by the White Helmets. Now that the Fact-Finding Mission has presented substantive evidence supporting the conclusion that chlorine was used as a chemical weapon in Douma, these actors continue their systematic denial, diversion, and distortion.

The overwhelming majority of States Parties are strongly unified in our commitment to eliminating chemical weapons. Let me be clear: efforts to undermine the Secretariat and divide our Organisation will fail. For its part, Canada will continue to work together with all States Parties determined to continue our progress, to engage in dialogue and find common ground.

As we have done for many years, Canada will continue to match our strong words on Syria with tangible and constructive contributions. To date, we have provided more than C\$33M to mitigate and respond to Syrian chemical weapons threats. During our Global Partnership (GP) Chairmanship in 2018, we prioritised support for Strengthening and Supporting the OPCW. We are pleased that the GP's Chemical Security Strategic Vision was amended last October to recognise the critical role played by the OPCW in preventing, detecting, and responding to all manner of chemical weapons threats and to confirm the commitment of GP partners to supporting the OPCW to enhance its capabilities, including through the new Centre for Chemistry and Technology. Ambassador Puja of Indonesia and I will continue to work with the Group of Friends of the Lab to ensure that the new Centre for Chemistry and Technology belongs to all States Parties, as an important venue for capacity building. The support, guidance and contributions of all States Parties are critical to the success of the Centre, so please join us in this effort.

While the new Centre for Chemistry and Technology is critical to the future of the OPCW, there are other no less important elements of the Organisation's architecture and infrastructure that demand our attention and support. In this regard, Canada is finalising a new financial contribution to the OPCW to support the recently established mechanism to attribute responsibility for chemical weapons use in Syria, to ensure uninterrupted operation of the Organisation's investigative efforts in Syria and to redress IT and security vulnerabilities to better guard against future cyber-attacks.

Madam Chair, Canada's Feminist International Assistance 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 fields, but also in security policy and programming. We were pleased to host the Women in Chemistry Symposium last June in Ottawa, and will provide support for the 2019 Symposium. While Canada remains a staunch supporter of the OPCW, we continue to encourage the OPCW and the Director-General to actively seek to recruit qualified women to the Secretariat, particularly in its most senior and leadership roles.

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

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