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CANADA

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR LISA HELFAND
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF CANADA TO THE OPCW
AT THE NINETY-NINTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Excellencies and distinguished colleagues,

Canada congratulates Her Excellency Ambassador Eniola Olaitan Ajayi of Nigeria on her appointment as Chairperson of the Executive Council (“the Council”). I assure her of Canada’s full support and cooperation in leading the work of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) this week and beyond.

The Council meets when international peace and security stand on a precipice. Canada strongly condemns President Putin’s wilful and unjustifiable invasion of Ukraine. We stand with the Ukrainian Government and the people of Ukraine as they bravely defend themselves. We are alarmed by recent public statements by Russian officials that seem to imply their intent to carry out a chemical weapons attack, possibly as a false flag in an attempt to justify further aggression. The use of chemical weapons is unacceptable and a blatant violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (“the Convention”). The world is watching, and will not stand for it.

This context makes our continued commitment to the work before us at the OPCW all the more urgent. The priorities Canada will address here are as follows: preparation for the Fifth Review Conference; recent reports of the Fact-Finding Mission in Syria (FFM); sustained efforts to address violations of the Convention; gender equality; support for the Centre for Chemistry and Technology (ChemTech Centre); and the security of the OPCW.

This Council session marks the beginning our year to prepare for the Fifth Review Conference in May 2023. Many lessons were learned in the difficult process leading up to the Fourth Review Conference. Now, we must begin to work with a renewed spirit of cooperation and common purpose for a constructive preparatory process, to build momentum for the next phase of implementation of the Convention. Canada pledges to work in this spirit with all States Parties in paving the road to a successful Review Conference.

In the meantime, however, violations of the core principles of the Convention must remain a priority for the States Parties, to demonstrate their commitment to the Convention and the relevance of the OPCW as a body capable of addressing these challenges.



In January, the Technical Secretariat (“the Secretariat”) released two reports of the FFM. The first concluded that there were reasonable grounds to believe that a vesicant chemical substance from Schedule 1.A.04, a form of sulfur mustard, was used as a weapon in Marea on 1 September 2015, though there was insufficient data to establish whether the same thing happened two days later in the same area. The second report concluded that there were reasonable grounds to believe that a chlorine barrel was used as a weapon in Kafr Zeita on 1 October 2016.

Canada condemns in the strongest possible terms the use of chemical weapons in Syria by any party. It appreciates the FFM’s continued independent, impartial, and professional work. We would point out that the FFM is reporting not only on cases where chemical weapons were found to have been used, but also cases where a conclusion could not be reached because of insufficient evidence. We look forward to future reporting by the Investigation and Identification Team on cases where the FFM considered it likely that chemical weapons were used.

We note with great concern that 20 issues of substance remain to be resolved in the Syrian declaration. Canada urges the Syrian regime to cooperate fully with the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT), in particular by urgently issuing a visa for the final member of the team so that it can continue its important work. Moreover, we urge Syria to complete all of the necessary measures to regain its rights and privileges under the Convention, in particular by submitting a complete and accurate declaration, the most basic obligation under the Convention.

Major questions remain around another violation of the Convention, namely, the novichok attack on Alexei Navalny in Russia in August 2020. The Russian Federation has yet to carry out the required investigation for the use of a chemical weapon on its territory. It refused to cooperate with the Secretariat on standard protocols for the deployment of a technical assistance visit, and with other States Parties in answering questions raised concerning this incident. We urge the Russian Federation to take action and ensure accountability for the use of a chemical weapon on its territory.

On a more positive note, we are pleased to recognise the Secretariat’s recent efforts to further advancing gender equality and diversity within the OPCW. We recognise that this is a challenge that requires a prolonged and sustained effort towards institutional change, for any organisation. This is why we will continue to work within this community to support such efforts not only at the OPCW, but also within our delegation and in how we engage as a State Party in our work here. As an International Gender Champion, I am personally committed to this, and look forward to working with the Director-General, who is also an International Gender Champion, and with all other delegations to advance this vital work.

We also understand that strengthening gender equality within the OPCW requires a cultural shift and that this change will not happen overnight. We hope that, with continued work by the Secretariat and with support from all States Parties, gender equality can be integrated not only into the staffing of the Organisation, but also into its capacity-building activities, including the work carried out by the new ChemTech Centre.

Canada remains deeply committed to supporting the OPCW, not only with its words, but also by making sure the OPCW has the resources to do its job effectively. In the past decade, we have provided more than EUR 31 million in voluntary contributions to support the OPCW’s critical work, including EUR 7 million for the construction of the new ChemTech Centre.

Together with other members of the G7-led Global Partnership, we are currently exploring the potential for additional support to strengthen the OPCW and uphold the Convention.

We are happy to note that the construction of the ChemTech Centre is on target, taking physical form, and is set to be completed next year. We are delighted to note that 52 States and the European Union, along with civil society organisations, made financial investments to a centre that will serve the broader community working to implement the Convention.

Finally, as we all know, on 3 December last year protesters breached the perimeter of the OPCW Headquarters, entering the building by force and intruding beyond what could ever have been imagined. This was a terrifying experience for the Secretariat staff, who could never have believed that something like this could happen here. We were simply fortunate that this did not happen at a time when delegations were also in the building for a meeting. This incident is a stark reminder that the physical security of the OPCW Headquarters affects every person who comes through its doors. It is the responsibility of all States Parties. Over the past five years, Canada has provided over CAD 2.5 million to support critical upgrades for the OPCW. It is our sincere hope that our shared responsibility for this will be taken into consideration when we begin discussions to update the 2022–2023 budget.

I ask that the full version of this statement be made an official-series document of the Ninety-Ninth Session of the Council and that it be posted on Catalyst and the public website of the OPCW.

Thank you.

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