



STATEMENT OF CANADA TO THE 104th SESSION OF THE OPCW EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Excellencies and distinguished colleagues,

Thank you Chair. Canada appreciates your continued leadership at this session of the Executive Council – know that you can count on our full support and cooperation.

It is time to adopt the programme and budget of the OPCW for the next two years. Our delegations have worked closely over the past weeks to find common ground and agree on a budget that meets our needs, one which funds the activities which we want conducted, all while keeping any increase to a minimum.

The budget must include funding to the Syria investigations. The Investigation and Identification Team has reasonable grounds to conclude that the Assad regime used chemical weapons in Ltamenah, Saraqib, and Douma. The Fact-Finding Mission continues to identify chemical weapons attacks which took place, or in some cases conclude that no such attacks took place, whether due to lack of evidence or because the allegations were deliberate disinformation on the part of Syria. The Declaration Assessment Team still has twenty questions on Syria's initial declaration that require answers. Chair, we cannot let the OPCW forget its mandate to investigate chemical weapons use in Syria. This process must continue until all questions are answered fully and accurately, and all investigations concluded to hold those responsible to account. As such, the budget must continue to fund these investigative bodies. Any effort to de-fund them is an effort to shield a known user of chemical weapons who is in gross violation of this Convention.

The budget must include appropriate cooperation and assistance programs consistent with Articles VII, X, and XI. The OPCW Centre for Chemistry and Technology is now open, after years of planning, design, and construction. We must make maximum use of this tool. The Centre will enable programs to improve national implementation of the Convention and assist States to detect and respond to a chemical attack, and help build capacity in other ways.

The budget must fund industry verification. One of the original mandates of the OPCW was to ensure that chemicals are not misused toward the manufacture of chemical weapons. This is achieved in part through regular verification activities by the inspectorate. The number of annual inspections was reduced at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is important that the Organisation work to resume its earlier pace. The 2024-2025 biennial budget now before us meets these requirements, and Canada will support it.

Chair, we remain deeply concerned about chemical weapons provocation by the Russian Federation during their full-scale war against Ukraine. Since the invasion began, the Russian delegation to the OPCW has brought numerous false allegations to the OPCW that Ukraine plans to release toxic chemicals onto the battlefield. Russia has claimed to have evidence, but has shared none of it. They claimed attacks were imminent, but such attacks did not materialize. Meanwhile, Russian state-controlled media has reported that the Russian military used riot control agents on the battlefield in Ukraine. The Ukrainian delegation here has also reported this, informing the OPCW of attacks with grenades filled with a riot control agent released from drones in the Donetsk Oblast. We need not remind all that Article I prohibits the use of riot control agents as a method of warfare.



Three years ago, Russian agents poisoned Alexei Navalny with Russia's signature nerve agent, a Novichok, with complete impunity. Questions on this brazen assassination attempt remain unanswered. When will the Russian Federation admit that it has retained a chemical weapons capability?

Chair,

Despite the many challenges we face, there is a long-awaited success. The United States has completed the destruction of its chemical arsenal. The worldwide stock of declared chemical weapons has now been completely destroyed. This shows our collective capacity to make such monumental change across a span of decades. The OPCW now moves into a new post-destruction phase, where it must refocus its attention on preventing chemical weapons from re-emerging.

But in doing so, the OPCW must also retain its capacity to destroy such weapons. Four States remain outside the Convention, and it is very likely that at least one has a chemical weapons stockpile that will need to be destroyed. We have already named two States Parties likely in possession of undeclared chemical weapons. It will not be long until every inspector who has handled a modern chemical weapon will have tenured out of the Technical Secretariat. As such, retention of knowledge should be a priority, in particular on chemical weapons destruction. We are pleased that the Executive Council created a facilitation on the tenure policy, which is underway and will help address this challenge. At the same time, a Working Group on Geographic Representation has begun its work, and Canada is one of many States Parties who are committed to informal efforts to incorporate a gender equality perspective within the work of the Convention.

There is more good news. Last week on the margins of CHEMEX Africa in Algiers, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of South Sudan met with the Director-General, and reiterated his country's priority of acceding to the Convention. Canada was glad to help make that meeting possible.

Finally, Chair, I wish to reiterate Canada's longstanding support for the OPCW's invaluable work. Our support is not only with words, but with tangible actions. Canada's Weapons Threat Reduction Program has, to-date, provided over Can\$43 million in voluntary contributions, this includes Can\$33 million for Syria-specific efforts. We have helped fund the Syria investigations where the OPCW regular budget could not. We have contributed to the enhancement of the OPCW Headquarters' physical and cyber security. We were the single largest national donor to the construction of the Centre for Chemistry and Technology. We have also worked to create new tools both inside and outside the OPCW that could assist in the implementation of the Convention, in support for profiling of chemical samples, and also including a ChemInformatics tool to help national authorities and border security officers identify scheduled chemicals and a BlockChain tool which, when finished, could be used to reduce transfer discrepancies.

Chair, the OPCW continues to provide immense value to all member States. We must act collectively to ensure the Organisation has the resources it needs to carry on its work.

Thank you.