STATEMENT OF CANADA TO THE 105th SESSION OF THE OPCW EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Excellencies and distinguished colleagues,

As this is the last regular session of the Executive Council for Canada before we pass on the seat to our partner New Zealand, I want to begin by stating what a privilege it is to be part of this eminent body. Over the past two years on this Council, Canada has been guided by one goal: a world free of chemical weapons and the threat of their use, where chemistry is used for peace, progress, and prosperity.

Unfortunately, the threat posed by chemical weapons has not gone away despite the completion of destruction of declared chemical weapons stockpiles.

Canada reiterates its condemnation of Russia’s illegal and unjustifiable war of aggression against Ukraine. We remain deeply troubled about reports of the use of riot control agents as a weapon of war by the Russian military. We urge Russia to answer the questions posed pursuant to Article IX on this matter. Despite the clear prohibition of such activities by Article I of the Convention, Russia shows no signs of stopping.

Canada, with the rest of the world, was outraged by reports of the shocking death in detention of Alexei Navalny on February 16. In August 2020, 45 States Parties posed questions to Russia about Mr. Navalny’s poisoning with an unscheduled Novichok. Russia has yet to provide answers, and it has yet to conduct an investigation as required. Mr. Navalny has now been forever silenced, but the outstanding questions surrounding his poisoning remain and must be answered. Russia must provide a full account of the poisoning and must, in good faith, cooperate with the Technical Secretariat.

We were pleased that Syria ended its years-long block on full cooperation with the Declaration Assessment Team. This does not absolve the Assad Regime of more than a decade of wrongdoing. The undeniable truth is that the Syrian Arab Republic retained a chemical weapons capability after its declared stockpiles and production facilities were destroyed, and then used those chemical weapons in at least nine attacks, likely many more. The seventeen outstanding issues that remain unanswered on Syria’s initial declaration must be addressed, and Syria must fully cooperate with the Fact-Finding Mission and the Investigation and Identification Team.

We are deeply concerned by the use of chemical weapons by non-State actors in Syria as well as by the regime. The most recent report of the Investigation and Identification Team found that there are reasonable grounds to believe that Daesh perpetrated the 1 September 2015 attack in Marea with sulphur mustard. Concerted efforts must be taken to prevent non-State actors from obtaining and using such weapons.

For many years Canada’s Weapons Threat Reduction Program has supported critical OPCW operations and priorities, such as the Syria investigations and security upgrades, where the OPCW regular budget should have but could not cover the costs. To date, Canada has provided over CAD$46 million in voluntary contributions to the OPCW, which includes most recently CAD$2.1 million to support further OPCW efforts in Ukraine and Syria, as well as work on chemical profiling. We are grateful for the extrabudgetary contributions provided by other members of the G7-led 31-country Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction, which remains steadfast in its support for and commitment to the OPCW.
Chair, Canada’s position on the Israel-Hamas conflict is clear: an immediate and sustainable humanitarian ceasefire is urgently needed and necessary to finding a path towards securing lasting peace for Israelis and Palestinians. Any ceasefire cannot be one sided. Hamas must lay down its arms and release all hostages immediately. We again unequivocally condemn Hamas for its terror attacks on Israel on October 7.

We are also concerned about the potential for chemical weapons use in the conflict between Israel and Hamas. The Convention clearly defines the weapons within its scope. Although the use of white phosphorous munitions for their incendiary properties is outside the scope of this Convention, the OPCW should take allegations of chemical weapons use that fall within the scope of this Convention seriously, and be prepared to act accordingly.

On the subject of organizational governance, Canada was pleased to see States Parties adopt the decision amending the OPCW Tenure Policy and the action plan on geographic representation. We look forward to the release of the roadmap on workforce gender equality. With these initiatives, we envision a Technical Secretariat staff that is geographically and gender diverse, while retaining the knowledge necessary to ensure it can do its job effectively. We welcome updates on organizational governance matters this week.

Chair, I ask that the full version of this statement be made an official-series document of the 105th session of the Executive Council and published on Catalyst and the public website of the OPCW.

Thank you.