



STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF AUSTRALIA, CANADA AND NEW ZEALAND (CANZ) AT THE ONE HUNDRED AND ELEVENTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

AGENDA SUBITEM 6F: ADDRESSING THE THREAT FROM CHEMICAL WEAPONS USE

Thank you, Chair. I have the honour of addressing the Council today on behalf of Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

Almost three decades after the Chemical Weapons Convention entered into force, this organisation has made great strides, including eliminating all declared chemical weapons stockpiles. Despite this, chemical weapons continue to threaten global peace, stability, and prosperity.

Critical to addressing this threat is identifying the perpetrators of chemical weapons use. Attribution, as mandated under the Convention, is a powerful tool of deterrence and one we must employ in all circumstances to ensure the full and effective implementation of the Convention. Without attribution, there is no accountability – and without accountability, perpetrators are emboldened and impunity prevails.

In this context, CANZ welcomes the publication of the Investigation and Identification Team's fifth report into incidences of chemical weapons use in Syria during the Assad regime. The report is exemplary in its impartial, rigorous and comprehensive analysis of the facts. It concludes there are reasonable grounds to believe the Syrian Arab Air Force was responsible for the abhorrent chemical weapons attack on Kafr Zeita in 2016. We commend the IIT for its investigative work. In executing its mandate to identify perpetrators of chemical weapons use it has paved the way for future Syrian-led and internationally supported accountability processes that fall under the purview of other bodies vested with appropriate judicial authority. CANZ supports the continuation of this important function through the Office for Special Missions.

Chair, the identification of perpetrators of chemical weapons use cannot be limited to specific cases – it must be universal. CANZ therefore reiterates its support for Ukraine's formal request for the Director-General to progress the establishment of an independent and impartial mechanism to investigate cases of alleged use of chemical weapons in Ukraine and to identify those responsible for their use.

Chair, the OPCW is not a court. It will be for other institutions to ensure accountability by determining, to the requisite standards of proof, personal and state responsibility for use of chemical weapons. But the attribution work of the OPCW can and should be pivotal in laying the groundwork for such institutions to establish the truth and enable justice to be done.

Attribution is grounded squarely and firmly within the provisions of the Convention. For instance, under Article VIII and Part XI of the Verification Annex, the Technical Secretariat is obliged in the context of investigating cases of alleged use of chemical weapons to report to States Parties any information that might serve to identify the origin of any such chemical weapons used.

Attribution is also essential to achieving the Convention's objectives and principles. The Executive Council and the Conference of States Parties cannot reasonably take measures to redress a situation of non-compliance, as contemplated by Articles VII, IX and XII of the Convention, unless the perpetrator has been identified.

Chair, in the Ieper Declaration, which we all adopted by consensus in 2015, States Parties expressed 'their strong conviction that those responsible for the use of chemical weapons should be held accountable'. Accountability cannot be realised without attribution. We therefore urge all States Parties to join us in upholding these central tenets of the Convention.

Perpetrators of chemical weapons strikes must be identified, and the OPCW must play its part in enabling appropriate institutions to hold them accountable for their crimes. Thank you, Chair.