



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

**AGENDA SUBITEM 6(C): Elimination of any Remnants of the Assad-Era Syrian Chemical Weapons Programme**

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

Since this Council last met, we have seen opportunities and challenges in Syria, but also some progress.

The Assad regime's chemical weapons programme has taken up a lot of this Council's time for over a decade. It has had immense impacts on the victims of chemical weapons use. Last month, the OPCW released the fifth report of the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) which concluded that there are reasonable grounds to believe that on 1 October 2016, a "helicopter of the Syrian Arab Air Force dropped at least one [...] pressurized cylinder which hit a cave system in the Wadi al-Aanz valley in Kafr Zeita, [and that this] cylinder [on impact] ruptured and released chlorine gas, which dispersed [...], injuring 35 named individuals and affected dozens more." (S/2478/2026, page 2) Almost ten years after the event, the OPCW was able to attribute this attack using chemical weapons and name perpetrators.

The collaboration between the new Syrian authorities and the Technical Secretariat has allowed us to enter a new era in the investigation of chemical weapons use. This is an important step towards accountability; one step in a long journey that we hope will give closure to many Syrian victims. We commend developments like this, which show we are in a time of opportunity. The Secretariat, the Syrian authorities and all States Parties are building relationships of trust and understanding. With these, we can verifiably destroy any remaining chemical weapons in Syria, resolve outstanding issues related to Syria's chemical weapons programme, and achieve accountability for chemical weapons use in Syria.

We thank the Secretariat for its briefings, and Syria for the updates provided on its efforts. We see expansion of the Syrian teams, with the inclusion of several different government bodies – and all the coordination challenges such a complex effort requires.

However, we recognise that this is a process that we are all navigating, and one still filled with challenges. The DG's latest report and notes from the Syrian Permanent Representative show that coordination is a challenge, and that capability gaps and delays could lead to the loss or diversion of materials of concern. We encourage both Syria and the Technical Secretariat to continue their efforts to cooperate, to investigate and remain transparent as such challenges surface.

At the thirtieth session of the Conference of States Parties, the Conference tasked this Council to consider and decide on restoring Syria's Rights and Privileges within the Policy-Making Organs of the OPCW. We see the right direction of travel in Syria's progress, but recognise the challenges it is still navigating mean this is not the right time for such a decision. We encourage this Council to consider it again in July of this year.

At our last meeting, CANZ urged OPCW members to help provide sufficient resources to the Technical Secretariat to fulfil its clear mandates in Syria. Syria also needs support. It needs help to support the Secretariat in Syria; it needs assistance as it establishes its national capability; and it will need support to accomplish the verifiable destruction of the eventual identified and declared elements of the Assad-era programme. This support may be financial, it may be in-kind – it will also need to be the political support so that when Syria asks for help with addressing this poisonous legacy, the OPCW – the Secretariat and the Organisation’s membership – can respond affirmatively. Canada, Australia and New Zealand are considering how we can support these efforts, and we urge others to think creatively about the support they can offer Syria.

Chair, CANZ reiterates its enduring support for the full implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention. Chemical weapons are inhumane and threaten all our livelihoods if they fall into the wrong hands. We remain committed to transparency, accountability, and full compliance with the Convention, including in Syria, to support global peace, stability and prosperity.

Thank you, Chair.