



STATEMENT OF CANADA TO THE 108th SESSION OF THE OPCW EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

AGENDA ITEM 5: GENERAL DEBATE

DELIVERED BY H.E. MR. HUGH ADSETT, AMBASSADOR OF CANADA TO THE NETHERLANDS AND PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF CANADA TO THE ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS (OPCW)

Excellencies and distinguished colleagues,

Despite the destruction of all declared chemical weapons stockpiles, the threat posed by chemical weapons has not gone away.

Canada repeats its unequivocal condemnation of Russia's illegal and unjustifiable war of aggression against Ukraine, a war which started more than three years ago. This is a war of aggression, which violates the UN Charter and international law. It is a war which could have stopped three years ago with Russia's withdrawal of its troops to its own territory. It is a war which Russia can stop at any time by withdrawing Russian and proxy troops from the territory of sovereign Ukraine.

Since the earliest days of the war, we have been deeply troubled by reports of the use of riot control agents and even more deadly toxic chemicals, such as chloropicrin, by Russian forces against Ukraine. Some of these reports came from Ukraine, while others came from Russia itself, through statements made by Russian military personnel appearing on Russian state-controlled television. States Parties have repeatedly asked clarifying questions about these self-incriminating comments from Russian officials, but Russia has failed to engage in good faith in answering such questions.

The OPCW Technical Secretariat has now published two reports on Technical Assistance Visits to Ukraine. In these reports, the TS confirms that grenades containing the riot control agent CS have been used against military trenches controlled by Ukrainian forces. The grenades match Russian production and the serial numbers suggest they were produced in 2024.

The use of riot control agents as a weapon of war violates Article I of the Convention, and as a party to the Convention Russia is obliged to answer the questions raised under Article IX.

Chair,

Today, we are more optimistic about the situation in Syria. Canada welcomes the Syrian transitional government's commitment to maintain the security of the Assad regime's chemical weapons stockpiles while working with the international community to monitor them. We were pleased to read the report of the Director General's visit to Damascus last month and welcome his briefing today. His meetings with the Syrian President and Foreign Minister are encouraging signs that there can be real cooperation between the OPCW and Syrian authorities in the future, as evidenced by the subsequent appointment of a focal point for chemical weapons matters within the Syrian foreign ministry – like others, we welcome Ibrahim Olabi to this meeting. We also thank the Ambassador of Qatar for representing Syria's interests at the OPCW.



The status of Syria's chemical weapons remains largely unknown. The Assad regime obfuscated so many of the details. In the coming days and weeks we look forward to further progress reports from the Director General.

Of course, the elimination of the threat of chemical weapons use in Syria will not close all issues related to Syrian chemical weapons. The question of justice for the victims of chemical weapons attacks in Syria remains open, and Canada will continue to support efforts towards accountability, including the OPCW's contributions to this goal.

We also take note of recent reporting of chemical weapons use in Sudan and Myanmar. We request that the Technical Secretariat continue monitoring these matters and take appropriate action in case further evidence of violations of the Convention is uncovered.

Chair,

Canada continues to play a major role in addressing chemical weapons threats. To date, Canada's Weapons Threat Reduction Program, our primary contribution to the Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction, has voluntarily contributed over Can\$46 million to the OPCW. Among other things, this has supported the Syria missions, assistance to Ukraine, and upgrading physical and cyber security at the OPCW. As the President of the G7 for 2025, Canada is looking forward to working with the OPCW and Global Partnership members to ensure a coordinated approach to tackle ongoing chemical weapons threats and challenges.

Chair,

Over the course of the next few months we will work to choose this organization's next Director General. We hope this process will attract a variety of strong candidates from whom the Council will choose, on the basis of merit, the best successor to our current DG.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank DG Fernando Arias for his important work in leading this organization. We know his commitment to the OPCW and its goals, and we are confident that he will be ready to pass the organization to his successor in good shape.

Thank you.