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CANADA

**STATEMENT BY H.E.AMBASSADOR SABINE NÖLKE
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF CANADA TO THE OPCW
AT THE EIGHTY-FIFTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairperson,

As we stated to this Executive Council last week, Canada lauds the professional and impartial work of the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) in confirming the use of sarin on 4 April 2017 in Khan Shaykhun, the Syrian Arab Republic and exposure to sulphur mustard on 16 September 2016 at Um-Housh. To support these conclusions, the technical experts of the FFM painstakingly assembled an intricate and cross-corroborating web of facts from diverse sources – including the Syrian Government – and from a wide variety of evidence types, including biomedical and environmental samples, interviews with witnesses, and medical documents.

This is why we were surprised to hear the Russian and Syrian ambassadors use lengthy, theatrical interventions at the Fifty-Fifth Meeting of the Executive Council to question peripheral elements of the Khan Shaykhun incident – elements which the FFM made clear did not factor into their evaluation – while at the same time accepting fully the conclusion of the investigation, namely that sarin was used as a weapon on 4 April.

Mr Chairperson the intent of the Russian and Syrian delegations was simple: to throw up smoke screens in order to obscure conclusions that are supported by a large and credible body of facts. Canada finds it suspect that both the Syrian Arab Republic and the Russian Federation, having contributed directly to the report, persist in discrediting individual pieces of evidence, but not its overall findings.

In sowing confusion over dilated pupils, or the lack of secondary exposure, or the refilling of the bomb crater (and let us not forget that the regime obtained samples from the crater before it was filled in), the Russian Federation and the Syrian Arab Republic want us to lose sight of the bigger picture – a picture which the Director-General helpfully reminded us of last week in his update on the work of the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT). What is most striking about the FFM's conclusions on Khan Shaykhun is the extent to which they converge with what the DAT has been telling us for more than a year: that the Syrian Arab Republic has not fully accounted for its chemical weapons programme, and that some of the most glaring holes in its story point to the retention of a sarin production capability.

The Russian Federation and the Syrian Arab Republic want the international community to doubt the compelling fact-based dossier assembled by the Technical Secretariat by chipping



and nit-picking at its outside edges. However, in failing for three years to provide straight answers or credible documentation to clarify its declaration, the Syrian Arab Republic has relinquished the benefit of the doubt. We support the Director-General in insisting that the provision of meaningful records by the Syrian Government, as well as interviews with key decision-makers in the Syrian Arab Republic's chemical weapons programme, are a prerequisite for the resumption of any high-level dialogue with the Technical Secretariat.

Now that the FFM's evidence has passed to the Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM), the latter's work to attribute responsibility for the attacks in Khan Shaykhun and Um-Housh must be allowed to run its course. Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has said that "President Assad's use of chemical weapons and the crimes the Syrian regime has committed against its own people cannot be ignored." If indeed the JIM does add Khan Shaykhun to the list of chemical weapons attacks already ascribed to the Syrian Government, this Executive Council must consider appropriate consequences under the Chemical Weapons Convention. Executive Council members need to be prepared for this possibility.

We also note in this context, the concerns expressed publicly by the Head of the JIM, Mr Edmund Mulet, on the pressures exerted on the JIM by some governments. Canada expects all States to respect the JIM's impartial and evidence-based inquiry, and reiterates its unflinching commitment to the JIM, to which we have contributed CAD 2.6 million.

Finally, while still on the topic of the Syrian Arab Republic, my delegation would like to reiterate its support for the French-German joint statement first circulated at last week's special Executive Council meeting.

Turning to the other major item on this meeting's agenda, Canada is pleased to see such a large and diverse field of candidates present itself for selection as the next Director-General. We thank you, Mr Chairperson, for developing clear rules for this process in consultation with States Parties, and thank those candidates who have taken the time to engage with our delegation, directly or through our regional group. We may not currently have a seat on the Executive Council, but as the largest voluntary donor to the OPCW we have a keen interest in how the Organisation will be led in the future.

The next Director-General will be responsible for implementing and defending the OPCW's lead role in maintaining the global prohibition on chemical weapons, while preventing and responding to their use. He will also need to manage the Organisation's transition from a primary focus on the destruction of declared stockpiles of chemical weapons to preventing their re-emergence.

Canada therefore believes that the chief qualification to become the next Director-General must be an ability to foster consensus among States Parties wherever possible, and to safeguard the integrity of the Chemical Weapons Convention where it is not. He – and unfortunately, I must say "he" as no women candidates were presented by States Parties – must also be able to lend strong managerial, financial, and human resources oversight to the Organisation as it pivots toward its new mission and addresses emerging challenges: challenges such as the threat posed by non-State actors, and developments in science and technology that could open new pathways to chemical weapons.

Canada trusts that Executive Council members will place merit above all other criteria in making their recommendation to the Conference of the States Parties, and looks forward to

playing an active role in the process leading up to Eighty-Sixth Session of the Executive Council.

Lastly Mr Chairperson, my South African Co-Chairperson will provide an update on the deliberations of the Open-Ended Working Group on Future Priorities under agenda item 18. I would therefore like to use this national statement simply to thank delegations for their engagement to date, and to urge those who have not yet contributed to our sessions or made written submissions to share their views. It is critical that our recommendations to the Fourth Review Conference be formulated and agreed well in advance of the event and reflect the views of all States Parties, not just the most voluble.

Mr Chairperson, I ask that this statement be made an official document of this meeting of the Executive Council and published on the external server and the public website of the OPCW.

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