



## STATEMENT OF CANADA TO THE 87<sup>th</sup> SESSION OF THE OPCW EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

DELIVERED BY TIMOTHY EDWARDS, ACTING PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE

Mr Chair, Canadians were shocked and outraged to learn that a nerve agent was used on the territory of the **United Kingdom** in an apparent murder attempt on March 4. British authorities have responded quickly and comprehensively to this incident. We welcome their commitment as a State Party to the Chemical Weapons Convention to keep the OPCW informed as the investigation proceeds, including their initial notification to the Secretariat last week as well as statements issued yesterday and today. The two possible scenarios outlined by the United Kingdom – that a State Party has used a toxic chemical in a reckless attack on the territory of another State Party, or that this same State Party has lost control of a stockpile of toxic chemicals – are both deeply troubling. We call on the State Party in question to respond to the UK government's demand for an explanation.

Sadly, this latest incident offers further indication that the **global norm** against chemical weapons is being eroded at an alarming rate – a worrisome trend that began with allegations of use in Syria six years ago. Since then, both state and non-state actors have been found by independent investigations to have used chemical weapons on several occasions. The continuing lack of accountability for perpetrators appears to be feeding a belief – as we have seen in Syria, Iraq, Malaysia, and now the United Kingdom – that the international community is powerless to stop the use of toxic chemicals as weapons and that such crimes will ultimately go unpunished.

Mr Chair, Canada restates its condemnation of the **Syrian Arab Republic** for its continuing breaches of the Chemical Weapons Convention and international humanitarian law. We remain deeply distressed by the conclusions of the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) in its report of last October, notably that Syrian government forces deployed an aerial bomb containing sarin on April 4, 2017 in Khan Shaykhun.

This marks the fourth time the Assad regime has been found responsible for chemical weapons use. On that occasion, Syria's military used the very nerve agent it claimed to have shipped out of the country for destruction. The JIM's findings are proof, if any more was needed, of a conscious choice by Syria's senior leadership to ignore its legal obligations and flaunt the global taboo against chemical weapons.

Use requires possession, and failure to disclose such possession creates a second violation of the Convention by Syria, namely its failure to be truthful in its declaration. Four years of protracted consultation with the Secretariat without genuine progress show that Syria never intended to fully comply with the Convention. Indeed, the JIM's findings converge directly with what the OPCW's **Declaration Assessment Team (DAT)** has been telling us for nearly two years: that Syria has not fully accounted for its chemical weapons program, and that some of the most glaring holes in its story point to the retention of a sarin production capability.

Syria has consistently failed to produce meaningful documentation, senior decision-makers from its chemical weapons program, or cogent clarifications, or to follow through fully on the Secretariat's advice. In his latest report of March 2, the Director-General repeated a conclusion he first made in June 2016: that Syria's explanations are "implausible from a scientific and technical viewpoint". One need not read between the lines of this report to conclude that Damascus is manipulating the process to project a false image of cooperation.

Syria's lack of good faith should be evident to anyone who received the DAT's briefing on March 6. Syria's representative claimed that this four-year debacle is proof of its sincerity. We disagree. The fact that after four years we are further than ever from understanding the full scope of Syria's chemical weapons program – with 22 issues outstanding and counting – demonstrates the opposite. Sending 400 pages of documents to the Secretariat in November did not resolve any outstanding gaps; it only *added* to the list, with evidence that yet another chemical agent may have been developed – the seventh undeclared agent uncovered during the DAT's work. Moreover, it directly contradicted the vehement assertions of Syrian officials – month after month, year after year – that documentation on its program had either never existed or was destroyed in the civil conflict.

In the meantime, allegations of the use of toxic chemicals as weapons continue to surface in Ghouta and Idlib. We thank the staff of the **Fact-Finding Mission** for their swift and diligent response to these allegations, and look forward to their reports.



We are less pleased with Syria's insistence that the OPCW deploy a mission east of Hama after claiming they had discovered evidence of chemical weapons production by opposition groups at four sites. The report of this **Special Mission**, issued March 2, shows they found nothing to corroborate these claims. One has to wonder how much longer Syria will be allowed to continue diverting scarce Secretariat resources to these wild-goose chases.

Mr Chair, as stewards of the Convention, Executive Council members must be prepared to adopt measures that are within its power to address Syria's breaches, including under Article XII. If we do not act under these circumstances, then when will we? Syria has turned its back on the principles for which we all stand and is manifestly non-compliant. It is Canada's view that they have forfeited the rights and privileges of OPCW membership. They should no longer be permitted to sit among us or participate in this Organisation's full range of activities – at the very least until the DAT has verified that its declaration is accurate and complete.

Mr Chair, it must be said that in avoiding accountability for their actions, the Syrian regime has been abetted by **Russia and Iran**. As Canada's foreign minister Chrystia Freeland said on February 27, these two states "bear a moral responsibility for the regime's crimes". Canada deplores Russia's eleven vetoes in the Security Council to shield its Syrian ally from censure. This systematic obstruction callously ignores the suffering of Syrians and prevents the perpetrators of these atrocities from being held accountable.

Canada was disappointed that EC-M-56 was unable to take action in November. Accountability for attacks previously confirmed by the FFM and JIM must be pursued by all means at our disposal. For the OPCW, this should at a minimum involve the sharing of FFM reports and information with the **International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM)** as well as the expansion of the FFM's mandate to encompass attribution. We will also continue to push for this Council to fulfill its duty and ensure that the pursuit of justice for the victims at Khan Shaykhun and elsewhere does not end here. The Syrian government's actions are illegal and indefensible. Measures must be imposed to pressure Syria back into compliance with the Convention. Failure to act will leave the OPCW a permanently diminished organisation, one incapable of defending its foundational tenets.

In this respect, Canada was pleased to join the **International Partnership against Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons** in Paris in January. We see this as a complement, not as a substitute, to existing mechanisms, one which will strengthen the exchange of information among states to assist in domestic and international law enforcement and prosecutions. We salute the French government for their leadership and thank the Director-General for his presence at the launch event. We also urge all States Parties with an interest in bringing those responsible to justice to subscribe to the Partnership's principles and consider the application of sanctions against individuals and entities listed on its public website.

In support of concrete actions to mitigate chemical weapons threats, Canada, as 2018 chair of the now 31-member **Global Partnership (Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction)**, will focus collective attention on chemical weapons issues and is prepared to commit further national resources to this effort, including holding to account those that have committed chemical weapons atrocities.

Turning briefly to other matters, Mr Chair, Canada welcomes the DG's confirmation that the chemical weapons remnants at the Al-Muthana bunkers in **Iraq** have been verifiably encapsulated and neutralised, completing the elimination of that country's legacy program. Canada has been pleased to assist Iraq during this final phase of the destruction process, providing funds through the OPCW for Canadian specialists to train Iraqi first responders in medical counter-measures, and for Iraqi National Authority experts to enhance their sampling, analysis, and decontamination skills.

Lastly Mr Chair, our South African co-chair will provide an update on the deliberations of the **Open-Ended Working Group on Future Priorities** under agenda item 14. We thank delegations for their input and support throughout this process, and their positive initial feedback on the draft recommendations. We look forward to finalising this document in the weeks ahead.

Mr Chair, 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.