



**OPCW**

**Executive Council**

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**CANADA**

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR SABINE NÖLKE  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF CANADA TO THE OPCW  
AT THE FIFTY-EIGHTH MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

Mr Chairperson,

Canada condemns in the strongest possible terms the use of chemical weapons in the attack in eastern Ghouta, the Syrian Arab Republic, on 7 April 2018, resulting in dozens of fatalities. Our hearts go out to those who have lost family and loved ones.

The repeated, illegal, and morally reprehensible use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime has been previously confirmed by independent international investigators. It is part of a deliberate strategy to terrorize local populations and force them into submission. Canada condemns the Assad regime—and its backers, the Russian Federation and the Islamic Republic of Iran—for these systemic, gross violations of human rights and the continued, deliberate targeting of civilians.

Chemical weapons attacks are a war crime, as are indiscriminate attacks against the civilian population. Canada, alongside its international partners, will pursue accountability for these atrocities. Those responsible must be brought to justice, and the massacre of innocent civilians must end—not least if the Syrian Arab Republic is to have a future.

In this context, Canada supports the decision by the United States of America, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and France to take action on 14 April to degrade the Assad regime's ability to launch chemical weapons attacks against its own people.

Many States in this room have spent years employing every diplomatic means to halt the use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime. We have been repeatedly thwarted by the Russian Federation, which last week again vetoed a resolution at the United Nations Security Council to establish an impartial mechanism to attribute such attacks.

The Russian Federation and the Islamic Republic of Iran are the Syrian Arab Republic's allies and friends. The Russian Federation guaranteed the Syrian Arab Republic's compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention and United Nations Security Council resolution 2118 (2013), but has protected the Syrian Arab Republic from the consequences of its actions at the Security Council and in this Executive Council. The Islamic Republic of Iran has similarly worked to help the Syrian Arab Republic avoid accountability for chemical weapons possession and use. The Russian Federation and the Islamic Republic of Iran have



consistently shielded the Syrian Arab Republic from accountability in the face of its confirmed, repeated use of chemical weapons. In so doing, they share at least a moral responsibility for these crimes.

Canada calls on the Russian Federation to cease using its veto power to obstruct the investigation of chemical weapons use in the Syrian Arab Republic. We call on the Russian Federation and the Islamic Republic of Iran, who have a responsibility as allies of the Syrian regime, to use their influence to bring the Syrian Arab Republic into compliance with all of its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention. Unresolved gaps, inconsistencies, and discrepancies in the Syrian Arab Republic's declaration remain a matter of significant concern, and must be urgently addressed.

Mr Chairperson, Canada welcomes the Director-General's initiative to deploy the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) to the Syrian Arab Republic over the weekend. We note that this deployment coincides with a request from the Syrian Arab Republic and the Russian Federation to investigate the allegations of chemical weapons use in Douma. We look forward to the results of the FFM's work.

Canada has provided concrete support over the past several years to mitigate chemical weapons threats in the Syrian Arab Republic, including CAD 9 million for the verification, investigation, and fact-finding activities of the OPCW and the United Nations. We stand ready to provide further assistance to ensure the global norm against these weapons is upheld.

More broadly, Canada has responded to the ongoing crises in the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq with a multi-year, comprehensive commitment to address the needs of those most affected by conflict and its destabilising effects on the region. Since November 2015 we have welcomed over 50,000 Syrian refugees. From 2016 to 2019 we are implementing over CAD 2 billion in military, security, stabilisation, humanitarian, and development assistance, as well as enhanced diplomatic efforts. Among our priorities is pursuing accountability for war crimes and other grave breaches of international humanitarian and human rights law.

Mr Chairperson, in closing, Canada would like to express its admiration for the medical professionals and other organisations—including the White Helmets—who have been working tirelessly to save the lives of those affected in the Syrian Arab Republic. Characterising these humanitarians, who risk their lives to save those of others, as members of terrorist organisations, as the Syrian ambassador did again this morning, is an appalling smokescreen that cannot hide the crimes to which they heroically respond day after day.

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.