



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

AGENDA SUBITEM 6(C): ELIMINATION OF THE SYRIAN CHEMICAL WEAPONS PROGRAMME

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

Recent events in Syria mark a significant turning point for the Syrian people, who endured unimaginable hardship under the rule of the Assad family for more than 50 years. As Syria turns the page on this dark chapter marked by oppression, massacres, widespread violations of human rights, and the use of chemical weapons against civilians, we, as States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention, must seize this opportunity to finally come to grips with the full extent of the Syrian chemical weapons programme. We listened with great interest and appreciation to the statement today from the caretaker Minister of Foreign Affairs Asaad Hassan al-Shaibani and welcome his commitment to ensuring Syria is free of chemical weapons.

This Council has been discussing the shortcomings of Syria's initial declaration and its non-compliance with its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention for over a decade. The significant gaps and discrepancies in Syria's declaration always meant that there was a risk of undeclared chemical weapons, precursor materials and production facilities in Syria. OPCW Member States must now deal with that reality in a unified and responsible manner, including by offering our unequivocal support for the Secretariat's efforts to inventory Syria's chemical weapons programme and verify its destruction.

Chair, the OPCW, under the leadership of the Director-General, is fully engaged with the Syrian chemical weapons dossier. CANZ welcomes this week's update by the Director-General on recent activities undertaken by the Technical Secretariat in relation to Syria. It is our sincere hope that last month's visit to Damascus by the Director-General marks a turning point, following eleven years of obstruction and deadlock on the Syrian chemical weapons file. As the Secretariat continues the painstaking task of determining the full extent of the Syrian chemical weapons programme, it can count on the full support of Canada, Australia and New Zealand in our shared objective under the Chemical Weapons Convention of eliminating the risk of proliferation or use of chemical weapons. CANZ would like to take this opportunity to thank Qatar for its important role in representing Syria in the OPCW at this critical juncture, as well as the Netherlands and other states for supporting and facilitating DG Arias' visit to Damascus.

As members of the G7-led Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction, CANZ remains committed to this international initiative. With more than 20 years' experience in addressing CBRN threats by state and non-state actors alike, we believe the Global Partnership is uniquely placed to support the OPCW in the delivery of assistance to Syria, including in destruction efforts.

To close, Chair, Canada, Australia and New Zealand welcome indications from Syria's interim authorities that they will cooperate in good faith with the Technical Secretariat and fully comply with Syria's international obligations under the Convention. The time is long overdue to close this longstanding agenda item and foster long-term compliance, while contributing to regional stability and international peace and security. To quote the Director-General: "It is up to the international community to seize this opportunity to support the OPCW to eradicate this criminal programme once and for all". CANZ stands fully ready to support the Secretariat, and the Syrian Arab Republic, to achieve this.

Thank you, Chair.

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