

Statement by Minister of Foreign Affairs on release of report by Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons on chemical attacks in Syria

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Statement

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The Honourable François-Philippe Champagne, Minister of Foreign Affairs, today issued the following statement:

“On April 8, the Investigation and Identification Team of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons [OPCW] released its first report. In the report, the team identifies the Syrian Arab Air Force as the perpetrator of several chemical weapon attacks carried out in Syria in March 2017. The overwhelming majority of victims of these attacks were civilians.

“We condemn the Assad regime’s repeated and morally reprehensible attacks on the people of Syria, in particular, its use of chemical weapons. Any use of chemical weapons is an abhorrent breach of international law. Canada wholly supports efforts to ensure that perpetrators of such crimes are held to account.

“As a state party to the Chemical Weapons Convention [CWC], Syria has an obligation to fully eliminate its chemical weapons program. It has repeatedly failed to do so. We demand that the Assad regime declare its entire chemical weapons stockpile without delay so that it may be verifiably destroyed, as required under the CWC.

“Canada is committed to upholding the international rules-based order, including the prohibition on chemical weapons, and stands firmly against those who seek to undermine that order. The use of chemical weapons is unequivocally a war crime, and those who commit such crimes must be brought to justice without delay.

“Canada fully supports the Investigation and Identification Team and stands by the legitimacy and credibility of its work. This report alone cannot possibly provide adequate closure to the victims of these abhorrent crimes. However, it is our hope that through continued support of the work of the OPCW and other such accountability efforts, Canada and its partners in the international community can work toward the realization of a world free of chemical weapons.”

Quick facts

- The OPCW is an independent, treaty-based body established in 1997 to implement the CWC. With over 190 states parties, the CWC is one of the world's most widely subscribed treaties. It bans all chemical weapons and oversees their destruction in a verifiable manner.
- The OPCW is the only multilateral institution charged with eradicating an entire class of weapons of mass destruction. To date, it has verified the elimination of 97% of the world's declared chemical weapons.
- The Joint Investigative Mechanism, created by the United Nations and the OPCW, had previously concluded that the Government of Syria used chemical weapons against its own people. The mechanism was dissolved when Russia used its veto power in the United Nations Security Council to block its renewal.
- On June 27, 2018, the Fourth Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties (to the CWC) decided to establish the Investigation and Identification Team to identify those responsible for chemical weapons use in Syria.

Associated links

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