

Statement by Foreign Affairs Minister on Seven Years of Conflict in Syria

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Statement

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The Honourable Chrystia Freeland, Minister of Foreign Affairs, today issued the following statement:

“This month marks seven years of conflict and tragedy in Syria, and the plight of the Syrian people remains as dire as ever.

“Throughout the month of March alone, we have seen new waves of violence, with over 200,000 Syrians forced out of their homes in eastern Ghouta and Afrin. It is estimated that over 1,600 civilians have been killed in eastern Ghouta alone. We have also seen continued reports of the use of chemical weapons by the regime in Syria and indiscriminate attacks against civilians and humanitarian workers.

“Any use of chemical weapons is a violation of international law. Canada calls for the perpetrators of these barbaric acts to be brought to justice.

“March also saw the release of a devastating report, by the UN Human Rights Council’s Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, detailing evidence that Syrian government forces and other parties to the conflict have made widespread use of rape and sexual violence as a weapon of war. Such acts are war crimes. The report’s authors have recommended that the UN Security Council refer their findings to the International Criminal Court for possible prosecutions. We agree.

“The international community is watching and the perpetrators must be held accountable. Canada is actively engaged in efforts to hold perpetrators accountable. We are providing essential financial support to the collection and preservation of evidence in the region. This includes funding for sexual and gender-based violence investigators via UN Women, the Commission for International Justice and Accountability, and the International, Independent and Impartial Mechanism on International Crimes Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic. In addition, Canada has provided \$12 million for groups in Syria, such as the White Helmets, that are saving lives by providing communities with emergency response services and removing explosives. We encourage the international community to join Canada and continue to finance this important work.

“Russia and Iran, allies of the Syrian regime, bear moral responsibility for the continued suffering of the people of Syria.

“After seven years, there are simply no words left to describe the extent of human suffering in Syria. History will look unkindly on us all if we do not take collective action to end this conflict. We cannot allow what is happening in Syria to be normalized, as too often it is today.

“Canada calls on all parties to this conflict to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law, cease attacks on civilians and humanitarian workers and allow rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access to populations in need. Millions of people in Syria remain in need of lifesaving assistance seven years into this conflict.”

Contacts
