

Joint NGO Statement

**Centering the Humanitarian Impact of Chemical Weapons
in the Next Phase of the CWC**

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Mr. Chairman, Director-General, Distinguished Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am honored to present this joint statement on the humanitarian impact of chemical weapons. The enormous success of the CWC in unifying States Parties around the elimination of chemical weapons is an incomparable achievement, and as we enter the next phase of the treaty, we can strengthen the accomplishments made thus far by deepening our commitment to understanding the impact of chemical weapons in society.

The humanitarian impact of chemical weapons refers to the foregrounding of the differentiated experiences of individuals and communities who are affected by these weapons. While the critical work at national levels has accomplished the elimination of most chemical weapons stockpiles and introduced measures for verification and inspection by the OPCW, this work has not considered how different segments of society experience the impact of chemical weapons within their communities.

The OPCW has already stated its commitment to increasing gender equity, inclusion, and representation, but this attention to gender must extend beyond amplifying the voices of women on this issue. The OPCW should consider the ways in which chemical weapons affect men, women, and children in affected communities and support communities in ensuring effective medical, psychological, social, and economic resources. Particular attention should be paid to the generational impact of chemical weapons. Studies have shown that children born of women who were victims of chemical weapons attacks can suffer from birth defects and psychological stress. These children bear the burden of living with consequences of conflicts that took place before their birth, which bar them from full access to human rights. Working with those in the global health field would help foster understanding of mitigating these outcomes.

In addition to understanding the impact of chemical weapons through a gendered lens, it is important to take into account the ways in which race, class, sexuality, disability, and age determine experiences of chemical weapons attacks. While the universal goals of the CWC deliberately do not address these categories so that the treaty is fully inclusive, when assessing the consequences of chemical weapons we must understand that a one-size-fits-all approach is still a top-down directive. The OPCW and National Authorities should work directly with affected communities, be attentive to the nuances of each situation, and tailor its support for each context.

Finally, we cannot untangle humans from the environments in which we live, so a truly holistic understanding of the humanitarian impact of chemical weapons should take into account these weapons' effects on land, soil, air, water, and ecosystems. Living on potentially contaminated land is another way in which chemical weapons, both "old" and "abandoned," may cast a long shadow into future generations; this of course includes buried, dumped, and sea-dumped weapons, agents, and stockpiles, as well as both old and new battlefields where chemical weapons were once used.

The OPCW's work to promote the universality of the CWC has brought the world significantly closer to a future free of chemical weapons. However, promoting universality should not mean ignoring differences, but rather respecting these differences as qualities that can offer new perspectives and solutions.

Thank you, and we request that this statement be made part of the official proceedings of this review conference.

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