



**OPCW**

**Review Conference**

Fifth Session  
15 – 19 May 2023

RC-5/NAT.61  
15 May 2023  
ENGLISH and SPANISH only

**COLOMBIA**

**STATEMENT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR CAROLINA OLARTE BÁCARES  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF COLOMBIA TO THE  
OPCW AT THE FIFTH SPECIAL SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE  
STATES PARTIES TO REVIEW THE OPERATION OF THE CHEMICAL  
WEAPONS CONVENTION**

Mr Chairperson,  
Mr Director-General,  
Madam Deputy Director-General,  
Distinguished delegates,

I begin my statement expressing special recognition of H.E. Henk Cor van der Kwast, Ambassador of the Netherlands and Chairperson of this Review Conference, to whom I extend my best wishes for the management of this session; I share my full confidence in his leadership and his sound judgment in achieving a successful outcome.

I would like to extend that recognition to H.E. Lauri Kuusing, Ambassador of Estonia, who impeccably chaired the Open-Ended Working Group charged with preparing this Review Conference and generating a positive, flexible, inclusive environment that would support the search for agreements that will surely have a positive impact on the development of this session.

Colombia welcomes the Director-General, the Deputy Director-General, and the rest of the Bureau, and welcomes the hard work carried out by all the members of staff of the Technical Secretariat during this intense year of preparation for this session, as well as during the days of the session itself.

Embarking on the path of review and planning is not an easy task. This implies an important ability for self-criticism, as well as a strategic and deliberate vision of what is wanted, and how to achieve it. For one long year, we, the delegations of the Member States of the OPCW, have been meeting regularly to accomplish this. We have spoken, debated, negotiated, and arrived at agreements. For Colombia, this is an irrefutable demonstration of the important level of the Member States' commitment to and involvement in the operation of the Organisation and compliance with the provisions of the Convention.

It is clear that differences exist. Nevertheless, Colombia believes that common ground prevails and, for that reason, remains optimistic about achieving a result that will provide the Organisation with the tools necessary to confront new dynamics and realities.

With a spirit of continuing to build, I will underscore some of the points that Colombia believes to be crucial.



I would begin by referring to the successful regime established by the Chemical Weapons Convention, as the first treaty on weapons of mass destruction that establishes a strict system of verification and inspection, without leaving the promotion of international cooperation for the peaceful use of chemistry to the wayside.

This dichotomy is the reason why all of us here today feel seen and called. Effectively, this is not just about a global commitment to disarmament, peace, and security; it is also equally about the component of building capacities and promoting the peaceful use of chemistry, a topic of major relevance for a country's development.

In this regard, Colombia recognises the important efforts made by the Technical Secretariat, through its International Cooperation and Assistance Division, towards creating and strengthening the capacities of the States Parties through a varied assortment of programmes offered that have a holistic approach, are tailor-made, and that take into account the peculiarities present at the regional and subregional levels.

We welcome the recent inauguration of the Centre for Chemistry and Technology, a key tool for keeping the Organisation and the States Parties at the height of new developments in investigation and technical and scientific capacities.

Finally, bearing in mind the Organisation's current transition in relation to the imminent destruction of all declared chemical stockpiles, Colombia calls for greater attention and dedication to issues related to international assistance and cooperation.

When it comes to verification, Colombia welcomes the Organisation's important milestone that we will achieve this year: the complete destruction of all declared chemical stockpiles. This is no small achievement and therefore should be a source of pride for all of us in the Organisation.

On another note, we share the broad interest in the need to maintain established capacities in order to face new actors and threats. Likewise, we recognise the need to update and strengthen the Organisation's verification and inspection system so that it keeps abreast of new technologies and incorporates new selection criteria with regard to the geographic distribution of inspections.

We also reiterate our condemnation of the use of chemical weapons in any situation, under any circumstances, and by any actor, and we emphasise the need to ensure that all perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons continue to be identified and held accountable. In this regard, Colombia believes it is critical that the OPCW continue to carry out its verification and investigation work, which will make it possible to identify the possible use of chemical weapons and the perpetrators thereof.

With regard to the dossier of the Syrian Arab Republic, Colombia expresses its concern regarding the findings and identification made by the Organisation, and it calls for re-establishing its cooperation with the Technical Secretariat.

Verification is definitely a topic of priority at this Review Conference. As this is a process of reflecting upon what has taken place as we set new goals, Colombia believes it is important that the document resulting from this Review Conference include factual issues that are officially established by the Organisation, as well as a vision of what it wants to achieve with its existing mechanisms and tools. We are open to examining the phrasing of the language that will be proposed.

Colombia is working to consolidate as a “World Power of Life”, and it is for this reason that we hold the firm conviction that we must dedicate our efforts—national and international—to preserving and promoting human dignity. In this regard, it reiterates its commitment to the universality of the Convention as a crucial tool in disarmament and non-proliferation and, in general, for maintaining global peace and security and the development of institutional, scientific, and technological capacities.

It is an incontrovertible achievement that 98% of the global population lives under the protection of the Chemical Weapons Convention; today, we are 193 States Parties. Colombia recognises the Review Conference as an important opportunity to revitalise the efforts that are under way and makes a special call to those States that are not yet Party to accede to the Convention.

For Colombia, universality is closely tied to the national implementation measures set out in Article VII of the Convention. In this regard, we believe that in order to achieve true universality, it is fundamental to have in place comprehensive, updated, and duly implemented national legal frameworks. Only in this way will we be able to confirm with certainty the existence of a global regime that meets the object and purpose of the Convention.

While recognising the activities developed by the Technical Secretariat under Article VII, Colombia reiterates its call to broaden the narrative used to date on building synergies with processes and issues of global relevance in environmental, social, and economic fields. Without a doubt, this will lead to greater interest and prioritisation for the States Parties that have limited or intermittent interaction with the Organisation.

With regard to matters of the Organisation’s governance, in addition to aligning with the statement delivered by GRULAC, Colombia reiterates that the message of diversity and representation that the Organisation is building and maintaining will be directly related to the ownership, involvement, and affiliation that each State Party generates when tackling the issues that are collectively discussed and decided upon within the Organisation.

We believe that geographic representation is a priority issue and it lies with the States Parties and the Technical Secretariat to identify and implement effective ongoing measures to rectify the existing imbalance in the geographic representation currently observed in the Organisation’s Technical Secretariat. In this regard, we welcome that the document produced by the Open-Ended Working Group includes the establishment of a Working Group to be tasked with putting together an action plan to rectify this situation.

Colombia supports the effective incorporation of the gender perspective not only within the Organisation, but within its programmatic activity as well. As stated above, we underscore the importance of continuing to make progress with initiatives that are aimed at strengthening the representation and participation of women at the OPCW and their activities, without any discrimination, and under equal conditions.

Finally, with regard to the possibility of providing the Director-General with greater flexibility to retain talent and experience within the Organisation, Colombia believes that this power should be granted, always with the understanding that it is an exceptional condition that must be regulated and limited.

I would conclude my statement by extending an invitation, during these days of this session, not to lose sight of the long road that has been travelled, and to build upon what has already been constructed and lend to this process all of our good will and flexibility to reach agreements that will allow us and the Organisation to have in place a strategic guide for the next five years. We are nearly there!

I request that this statement be considered part of the official-series documents of this session and published both on the external server and the Organisation's website.

- - - 0 - - -