

**Statement by Dr Robert Mathews
University of Melbourne, Australia**

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

As many participants at this Review Conference will recall, the Conference of the States Parties (CSP) to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), at its Sixteenth Session in 2011, agreed to establish the International Support Network for Victims of Chemical Weapons, which would be financed through the establishment of a Voluntary Trust Fund (C-16/DEC.13 dated 2 December 2011).

In my statement this afternoon, I will provide a brief summary of how funds which have been provided to the Voluntary Trust Fund have been used to provide assistance to victims of chemical weapons. These activities have included the production of a medical manual by the OPCW in 2015 and the convening in June 2018 of an OPCW International Symposium on Medical Treatment of Chemical Warfare Victims.

Mr Chairman,

In 2015, the OPCW produced the “Practical Guide Medical Management of Chemical Warfare Casualties,” to assist medical practitioners who have responsibilities for the care of victims of chemical warfare. The major focus of this Manual was the medical responses required immediately following exposure to the major classes of Chemical Warfare agents including vesicants, nerve agents, choking agents, blood agents and toxins.

This Practical Guide, which is currently available in six languages, is available in a printed version and is also on the OPCW Website.

Mr Chairman,

The 2015 Medical Manual also identified, as a priority area requiring further consideration, the medical management of long-term health effects caused by exposure to CW agents. This led to the convening of an international symposium to further consider the medical management of these long-term health effects.

Thus the “International Symposium on Medical Treatment of Chemical Warfare Victims: Challenges and Hopes”, was convened at the OPCW headquarters in The Hague on 28-29 June 2018.

More than 50 experts from various parts of the world attended this symposium which considered many of the challenges associated with providing the best possible medical

assistance for victims of chemical weapons, with a special focus on the long-term health effects and the treatments necessary for these conditions.

The symposium provided a forum for participating scientists, clinicians, academia, and civil society to share experiences and exchange ideas in this field, with a view to identifying priorities for victims' assistance projects and future scientific research.

The symposium also provided an opportunity for the experts to discuss the latest findings on the long-term health effects of exposure to CW agents and to identify challenges and gaps in treatment provision.

The Symposium participants have recommended that the OPCW contribute to the establishment of an international network of clinicians, scientists, academia and civil society from various parts of the world who are engaged in this type of activity; this network would be able to provide a forum for the exchange of experiences and ideas about treatment and support to victims of chemical weapons, as well as identifying research needs and encouraging scientific collaboration in these areas of research.

The Symposium participants have recommended that the OPCW Network be used, *inter alia*, to share experiences based on the management of the long-term health effects of exposure, including through discussion of the latest findings on these health effects; to raise awareness about the care needed for those suffering from chronic effects; and increase the awareness within communities of the challenges faced by victims.

The Symposium participants recognised that there are both short-term and long-term psychosocial effects resulting from exposure to CW agents. Participants noted that many CW victims suffer from a range of psychological problems including: post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD); chronic depression; loss of libido; anxiety; personality disorders; disorders of consciousness, attention, emotion, behaviour, thought process and memory; lack of interest in social activities; loss of confidence; paranoia and nervousness. In view of this the symposium participants recommended a range of activities to support the treatment of casualties suffering from psychological problems.

The Symposium participants recognised the benefits of close collaboration between the OPCW and other international organisations, as well as the broader international medical community, in supporting victims of chemical weapons.

The Symposium participants recommended that the OPCW Network be used as a means to create a platform for building an international network for scientific collaboration.

Mr Chairman,

It is hoped that States Parties in a position to do so will provide funding to the Voluntary Trust Fund to enable this important work to continue.

Thank you for your kind attention. I wish for this statement to be made part of the final record of the Review Conference and be posted on the external server and website.