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Chair, Colorado Citizens' Advisory Commission  
Pueblo, Colorado, U.S.A.

Statement to the Twenty-Seventh Conference of the States Parties (CSP)  
Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)  
The Hague, The Netherlands, December 2022

Mr Chairman, Mr Director General, Distinguished Delegates and Guests,

I am honored to provide you with this update on activities in Pueblo, Colorado concerning the destruction of the chemical weapons currently being destroyed at the Pueblo Chemical Depot.

With less than a year to go before all chemical weapons in Pueblo will be destroyed, the workforce is moving rapidly to achieve this goal. Several milestones have been reached in this program. First, all 4.2 inch mortars have been reconfigured and are now being destroyed in the Static Detonation Chambers (SDCs). Second, all 155mm projectiles and 105mm projectiles have been destroyed in the Pueblo Chemical Agent-Destruction Pilot Plant (PCAPP). 694,669 munitions in Pueblo have been destroyed and 90.3% of all agent has been destroyed. 228 of 277 rejects, originally scheduled for destruction in the Static Detonation Chambers have also been destroyed. 351 rejects and leakers remain. This has been done without injury to the workers, the community and the environment. Lastly, the SDCs are running at 75% capacity awaiting final approval from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. Approximately 90 munitions per day are being destroyed in the SDCs. This number could go as high as 180 once final approval is received.

Currently underway is a plan to destroy about 40,000 of the 4.2 inch mortars at PCAPP. An Improved Cavity Access Machine that will allow for the removal of agent from the mortars has been developed and training on this equipment has begun. The new ICAMs eliminate the need for cutting the mortars, by inserting a probe into the top of the round and removing the agent with a vacuum. Permitting is pending, but operations could begin in late 2022. This innovation will provide operational flexibility to ensure that the September 30, 2023 treaty deadline is met.

As demilitarization at the PCAPP plant concludes, planning for closure is underway. Operations at PCAPP will end approximately April 30, 2023 to be followed by cleanup, decontamination, equipment removal and demolition. This process will take a minimum of 18 to 24 months. The workforce is also preparing for job losses by re-training and up-grading professional skills.

Under the auspices of the Assembled Chemical Weapons Alternatives Program and the United States Department of Defense, the PCAPP complex is carrying out the OPCW principles of citizen involvement, worker, stakeholder and environmental safety and transparency. These principles are often difficult to maintain over a long period of time, so constant vigilance is necessary.

Safety, another cornerstone of the program, is most important to the community and the Department of Defense. Vigilance must be kept throughout operations and closure to protect workers and communities from workplace accidents and environmental harm.

These accomplishments have been done while meeting the challenges of COVID-19. The personnel at PCAPP have followed the requirements mandated by the U.S. Center for Disease Control. Meetings have been conducted via teleconferencing and as many individuals as possible have worked from home. Enhanced cleaning of work areas has been implemented and barriers and partitions have been constructed to make a safer work site. Only a few workers have tested positive for the virus and no one has required hospitalization.

Thank you, for the opportunity to provide you with a glimpse into the chemical weapons destruction program in Pueblo. I request that this statement be a part of the record of the 27th Conference of State Parties.