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**REPORT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR LAURI KUUSING OF ESTONIA
CHAIRPERSON OF THE OPEN-ENDED WORKING GROUP
FOR THE PREPARATION OF THE FIFTH REVIEW CONFERENCE
TO THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL AT ITS 102ND SESSION**

Distinguished Director-General, Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

It is an honour for me to present my third report to the Executive Council (hereinafter “the Council”) as the Chairperson of the Open-Ended Working Group for the Preparation of the Fifth Review Conference¹ (OEWG-RC).

In line with the structure of my previous reports to the Council, my update today will first focus on the organisational aspects of the functioning of the OEWG-RC and secondly, on the substantive work of the Working Group.

Before giving you the overview of the progress and status of work, I would like to thank the Director-General for his kind words, but also all delegations for their constructive and substantive cooperation.

PROGRESS AND STATUS OF WORK

General functioning of the OEWG-RC

In the reporting period the Bureau of the Working Group met five times to discuss organisational aspects of the work of the OEWG-RC. The role of the Bureau proved extremely valuable for planning purposes, for ensuring proper time management in meetings, and for ensuring that all regional groups are well informed about the process.

In this context, I would like to express my appreciation and to thank the distinguished members of the Bureau for their active participation and support—the Ambassadors of Algeria, Mexico, and the Netherlands, as well as the former Ambassador of Japan, H.E. Mr Hidehisa Horinouchi.

I would like to use the opportunity to welcome the new Ambassador of Japan, H.E. Mr Hiroshi Minami as the new Vice-Chairperson (Asia Group) of the Bureau of the Open-Ended Working Group for the unexpired term of office of the Bureau.

¹ Review Conference = Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties to Review the Operation of the Chemical Weapons Convention.



Overview of the number of meetings and topics discussed by the OEWG-RC since the last session of the Council in October 2022

The OEWG-RC held thirteen meetings during the reporting period. In accordance with the programme of work, six meetings from mid-October to mid-December were dedicated to the review of the remaining items in our programme: ensuring the universality of the Chemical Weapons Convention (hereinafter “the Convention”), engagement with external partners, and education and outreach; developments in science and technology and their impact on the Convention; interaction with representatives of chemical industry and civil society; the contribution of the Convention to global anti-terrorism efforts; and organisational governance—ensuring that the OPCW remains fit for purpose.

Before ending the first cycle of our work in December 2022 and inspired by the survey conducted by the Chairperson of the Open-Ended Working Group on Terrorism, I conducted a survey in the OEWG-RC with the purpose of further informing the preparatory process to the Review Conference.

In total, over 50 delegations provided their views on the key achievements of the Organisation in the past five years, on recommendations the Fifth Review Conference should make, and on priority areas for the OPCW in the next five years. I presented an executive summary of the responses to the OEWG-RC at its meeting on 31 January, which was made available on Catalyst.

In January, the OEWG-RC held three meetings in order to consider over 35 national positions and working papers. Delegations had an opportunity to orally introduce their contributions by highlighting key elements and recommendations. All papers have also been uploaded to Catalyst.

On 1 February, the Chairperson’s draft provisional text was distributed to all delegations. The document consists of three parts: a political declaration, a review, and recommendations. In drafting it, my intention was to capture as many views as possible. Therefore, the text draws on: discussions and interventions made by delegations during the first cluster of meetings of the OEWG-RC (June 2022 – January 2023); proposals and papers submitted by States Parties and regional groups; presentations, papers, and reports prepared by the Technical Secretariat (hereinafter “the Secretariat”); and presentations received from the invited external stakeholders. Last but not least, the document was enriched by the responses to the OEWG-RC survey.

In February, the OEWG-RC held four meetings to discuss the Chairperson’s draft provisional text, starting with a dedicated meeting for general remarks on the text in its entirety, followed by three meetings devoted to consideration of specific parts of the document.

The approach I took for these meetings, with the endorsement of the Bureau members, was to collect specific comments on the text without engaging into a drafting exercise. At the same time, delegations wishing to propose specific language changes to the text, or to provide comments on proposals submitted by other delegations, were invited to submit them in writing. In response, over 40 delegations submitted language proposals which were uploaded on Catalyst, therefore ensuring transparency towards other delegations.

In addition, all written proposals were reflected in a bracketed version of the Chairperson’s draft provisional text for the information of all States Parties and distributed via email, as well as posted on Catalyst on 24 February. An updated version of the bracketed text, containing some late submissions and a few corrections, was further distributed on 7 March.

Furthermore and following on from my commitment to promote predictability and transparency of the preparatory process, at the end of February, I conducted another round of informal consultations with all regional groups. The purpose of these meetings was to take stock of the process, to receive feedback on the Chairperson's draft provisional text, and to seek guidance for the remaining period of the preparatory process.

On Friday, 10 March, a revision to the Chairperson's draft provisional text was circulated to all delegations. It reflects my best judgement based on the discussions in the room, the submitted language proposals, and the outcome of consultations with all regional groups.

My approach to drafting the revised text was explained in detail in the message distributed together with the document. In this forum, I would like to emphasise that at this stage of the work of the OEWG-RC, it is important that States Parties try as much as possible to consult with each other and work together to find a compromise on mutually acceptable language. I appreciate the declarations made by some delegations which have openly agreed to work together on specific regional issues, and I encourage all States Parties to follow in this vein as the preparatory work enters its final phase.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Before concluding my report, I would also like to take this opportunity to express appreciation to all delegates for their active participation in the meetings of the OEWG-RC and for their constructive approach which is enabling a smooth preparatory process. I would also like to reiterate my appreciation to the Bureau members for their valuable contribution and advice.

My gratitude also goes to all OPCW regional groups and their coordinators for their openness and willingness to provide useful feedback on the OEWG-RC process. I would also like to thank the Secretariat for the support extended to me and for their substantive contributions to the work of the OEWG-RC so far.

To conclude, I would like to reconfirm my goal to achieve consensus but let me remind States Parties that achieving one is a collective effort.

This concludes my report. I request that the report be circulated as an official document of the 102nd Session of the Council and published on the Catalyst platform and the OPCW website.

Thank you for your attention.