

NGO Joint Statement:
Preventing Acquisition of Chemical Weapons by Non-State Actors

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Chairperson, Director-general, Distinguished Delegates, Civil Society Colleagues,

We express our sincere appreciation for the opportunity to address the Conference of States Parties on the critical topic of preventing the acquisition of chemical weapons by non-state actors.

The Chemical Weapons Convention and the OPCW have achieved numerous significant achievements over time, driven by their noble mission of creating a world without chemical weapons.

Yet, the persistent threat of non-state actors and covert state sponsorship, using toxic or incapacitating chemicals as weapons, continues to be a significant concern for the OPCW, multilateral institutions, and the international community. Non-state actors, including terrorists and criminal organizations, pose an escalating threat in acquiring and utilizing chemical weapons, which can result in mass casualties, widespread panic, and destabilization of international security. Urgent action is needed to prevent the acquisition of chemical weapons by non-state actors and ensure global peace and security.

The consequences of chemical weapons falling into the hands of non-state actors are severe and far-reaching. Firstly, mass casualties can result from the deliberate use of chemical weapons, causing death, injury, and long-term health effects on a large scale. Secondly, the widespread panic and fear caused by such attacks can disrupt societal functioning and create chaos among populations. Thirdly, the potential for non-state actors to use chemical weapons can destabilize international security, leading to conflicts, tensions among states, and erosion of trust in international agreements. Preventing the acquisition of chemical weapons by non-state actors is crucial to avoid these catastrophic consequences and uphold global stability.

In the past, there have been several instances of terrorism related to chemical weapons, including the use of nerve agents in Malaysia in 2017, the use of chemical weapons by Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, and the Novichok incidents in the UK and Russia in 2018 and 2020. These events have significantly heightened the threat perception from non-state actors or terrorists. Although international efforts to limit the access of non-state actors to toxic chemicals may have had some impact, there have been instances of identifying and bringing to justice those responsible for chemical weapons attacks.

Until October 2017, the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) had limited focus on the threat of chemical weapons and terrorism. However, during the 86th Session of the Executive Council

(EC) of the OPCW, a decision was adopted to address this urgent threat posed by terrorist groups or non-state actors. This marked a new chapter in addressing chemical terrorism, even though the original focus of the CWC was on states. Now, it is imperative to move beyond providing assistance and protection to affected state parties and to develop effective strategies for preventing chemical terrorism, including robust response mechanisms, accountability, and persecution of perpetrators. This approach would serve as a deterrent to terrorists and their supporters, ultimately strengthening the CWC treaty regime to better address future threats and challenges.

Universal adherence to and compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) by all states parties is the most effective means to prevent the acquisition of chemical weapons by non-state actors. The CWC establishes clear norms and obligations, prohibiting the development, production, acquisition, and use of chemical weapons. Full compliance with the CWC ensures that chemical weapons are not obtained or used by non-state actors, thus safeguarding global security. The commitment of all states parties to uphold and implement the CWC is crucial in preventing the proliferation of chemical weapons to non-state actors and maintaining international peace and stability.

States parties, international organizations, and civil society have undertaken various initiatives and best practices to prevent the acquisition of chemical weapons by non-state actors. These efforts can serve as valuable examples for enhancing global security. Some recommendations for strengthening these efforts include:

1. **Strengthening national legislation and regulatory frameworks:** States parties should establish and enforce robust national legislation and regulatory frameworks to effectively implement the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and prevent the illicit acquisition of chemicals. This includes stringent controls on production, possession, transfer, and use of chemicals, as well as penalties for violations.
2. **Enhancing export controls and border security measures:** States parties should improve export controls and border security measures to prevent the unauthorized transfer of chemicals and related equipment. This includes rigorous screening of chemical exports, enhancing customs and border protection, and sharing information on suspicious transactions or movements.
3. **Promoting information sharing and intelligence cooperation:** States parties should engage in information sharing and intelligence cooperation to identify and disrupt attempts by non-state actors to acquire chemical weapons. This includes sharing relevant information, intelligence, and best practices among states parties, and fostering cooperation among law enforcement agencies and security agencies.
4. **Engaging in capacity-building and technical assistance:** States parties should provide and receive capacity-building and technical assistance to enhance their capabilities in preventing the acquisition of chemical weapons by non-state actors. This includes training, equipment, and technical support to strengthen national capacities in chemical safety and security, risk assessment, and incident response.
5. **Strengthening international cooperation and coordination:** States parties, international organizations, and civil society should collaborate closely in preventing the acquisition of chemical weapons by non-state actors. This includes strengthening international

cooperation, coordination, and exchange of information among states parties, international organizations, and civil society stakeholders, to collectively address the evolving threats posed by non-state actors.

By implementing these best practices and recommendations, states parties can enhance their efforts in preventing the acquisition of chemical weapons by non-state actors, and effectively uphold the principles of the Chemical Weapons Convention, thereby contributing to global peace, security, and stability.

In conclusion, preventing the acquisition of chemical weapons by non-state actors is a crucial component of global efforts to eliminate chemical weapons and maintain international security. It requires collective action and commitment by all states parties, international organizations, and stakeholders. As an NGO, we express our willingness to collaborate with states parties and other stakeholders in addressing this urgent issue. We thank the Conference of States Parties for their attention and consideration of our statement, and we stand ready to contribute to ongoing efforts to prevent the acquisition of chemical weapons by non-state actors and safeguard global security.

We thank you for your kind attention and request this statement be made part of the official published proceedings of this Conference.

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