

NGO Joint Statement

The Fifth Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties to Review the Operation of the Chemical Weapons Convention. (RC-5)

World Forum, The Hague, Netherlands May 15 to 19, 2023

Strengthening the Prohibition on the Use of Chemical Weapons

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Dear President, distinguished delegates, ladies, and gentlemen:

Mr. President, first, we would like to thank you for the opportunity given to civil society organisations to participate in this global forum and at the same time congratulate you on your election as President of this Fifth Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties to review the operation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CR 5).

Mr. President, scientific and technological advances in the fields of chemistry, engineering and biotechnology have enabled states and non-state groups to develop new chemical agents and new techniques to use them. These developments have led to increasing challenges for the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Perhaps the CWC's greatest accomplishment is that it demonstrates that all the world's peoples can actually agree on the verifiable elimination of these horrific weapons which have been widely judged inhumane, indiscriminate, and a gross violation of human rights, environmental protection, and laws of war.

Going forward, strengthening the ban on chemical weapons is crucial not only to limit the opportunities for these states and non-state groups to develop and use new and existing types of chemical weapons, but also to safeguard international security and public health in a constantly changing context, particularly with regard to scientific and technological advances in the field of chemistry, engineering, and biotechnology.

But the global taboo against chemical weapons possession, production, and use that the CWC is designed to uphold cannot be taken for granted.

Strengthening the ban on chemical weapons is therefore essential to combat the re-emergence and use of these weapons and prevent non-state actors from gaining access to them.

The main challenges to strengthening the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons include a mix of political, security, strategic and systemic factors, and in particular with the evolution of

chemical technologies and the attempts by some states and non-state groups to circumvent international rules.

Thus, the task of achieving compliance with the prohibition against CW use requires vigilance and persistence and international cooperation. Over the past decade we have seen success and failure in this regard.

The joint operation to remove and destroy Syria's substantial chemical weapons arsenal following the horrific Sarin gas attacks in 2013 was a remarkable achievement.

And yet, in the years since, we have seen the sporadic use of chemical weapons in Syria and Iraq numerous times over the past decade and have also seen at least two assassination attempts in the United Kingdom and Russia using an advanced, militarized nerve agent over the past three years. We also have seen the successful assassination in Malaysia of a North Korean citizen with nerve agent.

Holding the line against further chemical weapons use is a core international security interest of all CWC States Parties. Chemical weapons produce horrible effects and the erosion of the global taboo against chemical weapons use can lead to an increase in significant use of weapons of mass destruction, and more widespread death, in the future.

We applaud the establishment and ongoing investigations of the OPCW Declaration Assessment Team (DAT), the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM), and the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) into these alleged violations of the CWC with banned chemical agents.

Mr. President, the Fifth Review Conference of the CWC provides us with an opportunity to chart a course for the implementation of the CWC for the next five years and beyond. As a member organisation of the Chemical Weapons Convention Coalition, we encourage States Parties to the Convention to strengthen their common position on the prohibition of the use of chemical weapons.

We believe that the CWC is an essential pillar of the rules-based international order, and we are committed to promoting a culture of non-use of chemical weapons.

Amidst rising geopolitical tensions, the emergence of new technologies and a crumbling arms control architecture, the CWC remains a unique multilateral instrument that, since its entry into force, has provided a stable institutional, legal, and political framework for

chemical disarmament and non-proliferation.

In the years ahead, CWC states parties must continue to **strengthen the IIT verification regime to ensure that States Parties comply with the provisions of the Convention**. This can be accomplished by leveraging the OPCW's resources and capabilities and by adopting innovative approaches to information collection, analysis, and assessment. Their success requires all States Parties to fully cooperate with such inspection requirements and refrain from undermining the reputation and integrity of their investigations.

We must **promote international cooperation**: scientific and technological advances in chemistry, engineering and biotechnology are often the result of international collaboration. It is therefore essential to strengthen cooperation among States Parties in identifying and countering emerging chemical weapons threats.

We need to **improve awareness and education**: it is important to raise awareness of the dangers of chemical weapons and to promote wider education on the health and environmental effects of toxic chemicals.

We must **promote research and innovation**: Technological advances can also be used to develop more advanced detection technologies to help identify chemical weapons and production sites. This can help improve the verification regime and strengthen the ban on chemical weapons.

Finally, it is important to **strengthen the collaboration between the States Parties to the Convention, civil society through the CWC coalition and the OPCW** to develop specific joint projects that aim to strengthen the ban on chemical weapons through information, awareness raising, education and advocacy for the Chemical Weapons Convention with the objective of achieving universalization in order to ensure a safe and secure environment.

We request that this statement be made part of the official proceedings of this review conference.

We thank you and wish our conference every success.

Statement Endorsements (Affiliations are listed for identification purposes only):

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