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PREPARATION OF THE FIFTH REVIEW CONFERENCE TO THE FIFTH SPECIAL
SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES TO REVIEW THE
OPERATION OF THE CHEMICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION**

Mr Chairperson,
Director-General,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,

Introduction

It is an honour for me to present to you my report as the Chairperson of the Open-Ended Working Group for the Preparation of the Fifth Review Conference (OEWG-RC). Let me assure you of my full support for your work as well as my readiness to contribute to the proceedings of the Review Conference¹ with all the experience and knowledge I have acquired in my capacity as Chairperson of the OEWG-RC.

The OEWG-RC was established at the Ninety-Ninth Session of the Executive Council (hereinafter “the Council”) in March last year, following the recommendation of the Conference of the States Parties (hereinafter “the Conference”) at its Twenty-Sixth Session. The Working Group has been tasked to conduct preparations for the Fifth Review Conference, in cooperation with the Technical Secretariat (hereinafter “the Secretariat”), convened in accordance with paragraph 22 of Article VIII of the Chemical Weapons Convention (hereinafter “the Convention”) from 15 to 19 May 2023.

The Council also established the Bureau of the Open-Ended Working Group. In accordance with the practice of rotation, the Council appointed me as the Chairperson (representing the Eastern European Group) as well as the following Vice-Chairpersons: Ambassador Salima Abdelhak of Algeria (African Group), Ambassador Hidehisa Horinouchi of Japan, and after the end of his term of office, Ambassador Hiroshi Minami (Asian Group), Ambassador José Antonio Zabalgoitia Trejo of Mexico (Group of Latin American and the Caribbean States), and Ambassador Henk Cor van der Kwast of the Netherlands (Western European and Other States Group).

In the interest of time and also since my formal report has been issued as an official document of the Open-Ended Working Group (WGRC-5/1, dated 25 April 2023), I will focus only on key elements of the work of the Group and its final product, the Chairperson’s Draft Provisional Text.

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



OEWG-RC proceedings

In my work as Chairperson of the OEWG-RC, I was guided by the principle that any successful preparatory process must be transparent, inclusive, and predictable and therefore, I have devoted special attention to upholding these priorities in the proceedings of the Working Group.

Transparency

In the spirit of transparency, throughout the entire preparatory process I regularly consulted all regional groups. These consultations took place before the first meeting on 7 June 2022, halfway through the process, and at the end of the OEWG-RC proceedings in April 2023. These consultations allowed me to become acquainted with the thematic priorities of the States Parties for the review process, as well as with their expectations and with the subsequent feedback regarding the conduct of our business.

Transparency was also ensured by frequent meetings of the OEWG-RC Bureau, after which the Bureau members shared the most important conclusions with their respective regional groups.

Transparency was further exercised by keeping the Council and the Conference informed of the activities of the OEWG-RC through the Chairperson's reports to all the sessions of the policy-making organs convened after the establishment of the Working Group. I thank the delegations for all the kind words of support expressed during these sessions and meetings.

Finally, all contributions made throughout the process, such as presentations, working papers, national papers, positions papers, or comments and suggestions to the Chairperson's Draft Provisional Text, were made available on the OPCW external server—Catalyst. The numbers speak for themselves; over 80 documents were submitted by delegations, the Secretariat, and external stakeholders, excluding language suggestions. This represents the legacy of the OEWG-RC and demonstrates an unprecedented level of engagement of all parties in the process.

Inclusiveness

To promote the inclusive character of the OEWG-RC, apart from outreach efforts to regional groups, I paid special attention to ensuring the participation of as many delegations as possible during the Working Group's proceedings. We have built on the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic and thanks to the support of the Secretariat, all OEWG-RC meetings were held in a hybrid mode, allowing remote participation of delegations not based in The Hague or even experts from capitals. On average, 50 online participants followed each meeting, in addition to the high turnover of delegations in the Ieper room.

The OEWG-RC followed past practice and, upon my invitation, delegations had a chance to interact with the Chairpersons of the advisory bodies, the Scientific Advisory Board, and the Advisory Board on Education and Outreach. The Working Group also hosted a dedicated session with representatives of the international chemical industry associations and civil society. As time constraints did not allow us to accommodate all interested civil society organisations, a call for written contributions was issued and inputs received were posted on Catalyst for the attention of all delegations.

Last but not least, I introduced a new element in the OEWG-RC work. In December 2022, inspired by the survey conducted by the Chairperson of the Open-Ended Working Group on Terrorism, Ambassador Vusimuzi Philemon Madonsela of South Africa, I launched a survey in the OEWG-RC with the purpose of further informing the preparatory process of the Fifth Review Conference. Over 50 States Parties responded and shared views on key achievements of the Organisation since the Fourth Review Conference, and on priorities for the Fifth Review Conference and for the Organisation in the next five years. The executive summary of the survey's results was presented to the OEWG-RC at its last meeting in January this year and posted on the external server.

Predictability

The predictability of the process was assured by frequent communication with delegations either through my meetings with regional groups or with the support of the OEWG-RC Bureau. In addition, the OEWG-RC adopted its Programme of Work by consensus at its first meeting on 7 June 2022, which was further amended in December 2022 to cover the period until April 2023.

Guided by the States Parties' views, the Programme of Work of the Working Group from June to December 2022 has been based on a thematic approach to the review of the Convention. It envisaged discussion on all issues that are important for the implementation of the Convention, including verification, international cooperation and assistance, universality, external engagement, governance, as well as different cross-cutting topics on which the guidance of States Parties for the next five years would be valuable.

The second phase of work started on 14 January 2023 with presentations and discussions of national positions and working papers. On 1 February 2023, the first draft of the Chairperson's Draft Provisional Text was distributed to all delegations. Work on the text thereafter continued until 12 April. On 17 April, the Secretariat, acting under its Convention-mandated obligation to assist the policy-making organs and their subsidiary bodies and its Conference-mandated role of cooperation with the OEWG-RC, distributed the final version of the Chairperson's Draft Provisional text on my behalf. On 2 May 2023, consistent with the nature of the text as a document prepared for assisting in the preparations of the Fifth Review Conference and based on past practice, the text was issued as an official-series document (WGRC-5/2 RC-5/CRP.1, dated 2 May 2023), and it was also subsequently made available to States Parties in all official languages of the Organisation.

Draft Provisional Text

The Chairperson's Draft Provisional Text (WGRC-5/2 RC-5/CRP.1) has been formulated under my responsibility. It represents a tangible result of the preparatory work conducted by States Parties since June 2022 in line with the mandate given to the OEWG-RC by the Council at its Ninety-Ninth Session following the recommendation of the Conference at its Twenty-Sixth Session. The Draft Provisional Text draws on multiple sources including discussions and interventions made by delegations, proposals and papers submitted by States Parties and regional groups, presentations by the Secretariat, presentations received from external stakeholders, as well as from the results of the OEWG-RC survey. It should be read through the prism of all these contributions and discussions.

In my role as Chairperson of the OEWG-RC, I promised to do my best to achieve consensus on the Draft Provisional Text. With the assistance of delegations, we have managed to make significant progress in our deliberations, reducing the number of open issues to just a few.

The substance surrounding them has been extensively discussed, so States Parties are aware that finding common ground remained extremely complicated on some verification-related issues. These issues are mostly of political nature and therefore it was challenging for the OEWG-RC to resolve them. Our efforts to reach agreement should continue at this Review Conference, building on the foundations laid by the work of the OEWG-RC and the proposals submitted by States Parties.

In this context, I would like to express my appreciation to you, Chairperson, for organising the ambassadorial retreat at the end of April in preparation of the Fifth Review Conference. The retreat built on the positive and constructive atmosphere of the deliberations in the OEWG-RC. The discussions among some 91 States Parties that took part in it allowed us to consolidate mutual understanding on key issues before the Review Conference. It is my hope that this approach could be emulated under your able leadership.

Conclusions

Before concluding my report, I would like to express my appreciation to all delegations for their contributions as well as for their constructive and efficient approach throughout the 10 months long process of the work of the OEWG-RC since June 2022.

I would also like to thank the Bureau members for their valuable contribution and advice. My gratitude also goes to all 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 Director-General and the Secretariat for the support extended to me and their substantive contributions to the OEWG-RC work.

This concludes my report. I request that the report be circulated as an official document of the Review Conference and published on Catalyst and the OPCW website.

Thank you for your attention.

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