



GERMANY

FOLLOW-UP TO THE FIFTH SPECIAL SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES TO REVIEW THE OPERATION OF THE CHEMICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION – ENGAGEMENT WITH CIVIL SOCIETY

While approaching the historical milestone of the destruction of all declared chemical weapons, the OPCW and its States Parties continue to face the challenge of preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons. Tackling this challenge requires broad multi-stakeholder engagement. In this respect, civil society¹ is an important partner of States Parties and the OPCW.

Much as the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention is the responsibility of the States Parties who will ultimately decide with whom they engage, civil society organisations can provide valuable expertise and outreach, thus complementing and supporting the work of the OPCW.

The important role of civil society was discussed comprehensively in the run-up and during the Fifth Review Conference, including by sharing non-papers on the topic (for example, “Outreach to Academia and to the Chemical Industry” by France and “Participation of Civil Society through Non-Governmental Organisations” by Germany). Many States Parties expressed their appreciation of the interaction with civil society and underlined the valuable and diverse input in terms of expertise and technical knowledge it can provide. There was agreement in principle that there should be a review of the guidelines for the attendance and participation by NGOs wishing to take part in sessions of the Conference and Review Conferences, in order to devise clearly defined and transparent procedures based on international best practice.

Interaction with civil society actors helps foster a sense of ownership within civil society, which was identified as a requirement for the successful implementation of the Convention in the “Medium-term Plan of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons 2017–2021”: “Successful implementation of the Convention cannot be achieved simply through a regulatory approach by national governments. It also requires instilling a sense of ownership into relevant stakeholders in the chemical industry, research, academia, NGOs, and civil society in order to garner their support and active collaboration” (EC-83/S/1 C-21/S/1, dated 8 April 2016).

¹ The term “civil society” refers to all forms of social action carried out by individuals or groups who are neither connected to nor managed by State authorities. Thus, civil society not only encompasses non-governmental organisations (NGOs) but also chemical industry associations and scientific research institutes, including think tanks.



The Advisory Board on Education and Outreach (ABEO) stated that “The Secretariat should systematically develop more interactive approaches across the full range of its [Education & Outreach] activities” (ABEO-5/1, dated 12 February 2018) thus emphasising the need of a diversified approach to outreach. In this context, we welcome the ABEO’s initiative to create partnerships between the OPCW and universities as mentioned in its briefing to States Parties on 21 June 2023 during its Fifteenth Session.

However, currently there is no form of regular structured engagement between the Technical Secretariat, States Parties, and civil society. Also, exchange between the OPCW’s policy-making organs and NGOs during intersessional periods is very limited. Consequently, the full potential of the interaction with civil society is far from being utilised for the benefit of the OPCW.

Way forward

The challenge is, among others, to establish a more regular and structured debate with civil society, while taking into account the fact that civil society organisations work on a broad range of different issues.

It might be worth exploring, for example, how to better and more systematically involve chemical industry associations in the discussions on issues like industry verification or chemical safety and security, or how to intensify the exchange with academic institutions on current developments in science and technology, including artificial intelligence (AI).

In order to ensure an exchange also during the intersessional period, thematic workshops focusing on specific issues of common concern as well as an annual “Civil Society Day” at the OPCW could be conducted.

Moreover, a review of the guidelines for the attendance and participation by NGOs wishing to take part in sessions of the Conference and Review Conferences should be discussed.

Against this background, it is suggested to start a discussion among interested States Parties about the options on how to ensure a more structured and systematic interaction with civil society. In order to provide a basis to help inform the discussion, the Technical Secretariat should prepare a report on the lessons learned on the exchange and cooperation between the OPCW and civil society organisations in the last five years. The way in which this discussion should be conducted still needs to be determined, possibly in the framework of a facilitation process. The Conference of the States Parties in 2023 should take stock of the discussion and possibly give guidance on the way ahead.