

Joint NGO Statement

Chemical Weapons Victims' Rights and Health

Statement Prepared by

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Mr. Chairman, Director-General, Distinguished Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is an honor to speak on behalf of the victims of chemical weapons regarding their rights and health. The use of chemical weapons has caused numerous tragedies that will not be forgotten by history or our conscience.

The immediate and long-term needs of chemical weapons victims require urgent attention. The main priority is providing medical assistance, specifically for the treatment of long-term health effects. National medical communities struggle to understand and provide adequate care for the unique needs of victims of chemical weapons. Therefore, we call upon the international community and organizations such as the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to encourage CWC States Parties, individuals, and organizations to contribute to the OPCW Trust Fund for CW victims. This will enable the Technical Secretariat to conduct more activities under the auspices of the International Support Network for CW victims.

To address both short-term and long-term effects, States Parties should actively support CW victims by providing medical treatment in their home countries, organizing events to raise awareness at the national level regarding victims of chemical weapons, exchanging information on experiences related to treatment of victims of chemical weapons, facilitating materials and equipment-related assistance to States Parties, and conducting more awareness-raising programs regarding the consequences of the use of CW.

Moreover, we recommend prioritizing and providing financial support to research projects on the treatment for long-term health effects through international cooperation programs including the WHO and OPCW, providing financial support for victim assistance projects conducted by NGOs, and establishing rehabilitation centers for the victims of chemical weapons.

The issue of physical and mental health is the primary concern of chemical victims, who face numerous medical and psychological problems. These include respiratory problems, eye problems, corneal burns, skin burns, and internal problems, for which they require ongoing treatment, medicine, and hospitalization, often for several decades.

Unfortunately, chemical weapons victims also suffer from a range of psychological problems including post-traumatic stress disorder, chronic depression, anxiety, lack of interest in social

activities, and loss of confidence. Therefore, we recommend regular psychological screening and routine check-ups to evaluate the severity of disorders and response to treatment. Furthermore, we recommend raising awareness within the families of victims of the problems faced by the victims when they are reintegrating into their families and networks, including due to trauma and stigmatization.

Stigmatization is also a considerable problem for those exposed to chemical weapons, with casualties being labeled as "victims" in society and perceived as a burden. We urge the international community to facilitate the punishment of the perpetrators and supporters of such inhumane acts, including countries and companies that supported certain states to use CWs, whose liability is no less than those who order or commit such crimes.

The development of plans for nature-based activities for the chemically injured people can also help to improve their quality of life and health. We also recommend that a common protocol be adopted to remove the special drugs for chemical victims from economic sanctions.

Finally, we recommend conducting studies on the persistent effects of chemical warfare agents on the environment, especially on soil, plant, and animal species in affected areas, and conducting remediation projects in the exposed areas. We stand ready to actively participate in works focused on chemical weapons victims' needs, or any assistance and cooperation with OPCW in this regard.

Thank you, and we request that this statement be made part of the official CSP-28 proceedings.

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

Shahriar Khateri, *Tehran Peace Museum*

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