

The 28th Session of the Conference of the States Parties
General Debate
Statement by H.E. Ambassador Hyoung-chan Choe
Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea to
the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons

27 November 2023, The Hague

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

Let me begin by congratulating Ambassador Suljuk Mustansar Tarar of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan on his assumption of the Chairperson of the 28th Session of the Conference of the States Parties. Under his outstanding leadership and expertise, I believe this Session will produce meaningful outcomes.

I would also like to pay tribute to the endless endeavors of Director-General Fernando Arias and the staff members of the Technical Secretariat (TS) to fully implement the core mandates of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC).

Mr. Chair,

This year marks a critical juncture for the joint efforts of the States Parties and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) toward a chemical weapon-free world. We welcome the historic milestone of the complete elimination of all declared chemical weapons stockpiles. The inauguration of the new ChemTech Centre is a prime example of our aspiration for a technical hub that will significantly enhance the capacity of the OPCW and all States Parties, thereby preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons in the future. Regrettably, the Fifth Review Conference was not able to adopt a final outcome document. But we are steadily making progress on the actionable matters.

Bearing in mind these achievements and noticeable steps, we should renew our commitment to preventing the use of chemical weapons as a foremost priority. My delegation reiterates that the use of chemical weapons cannot be tolerated under any circumstances. All those responsible for chemical weapons use must be held accountable.

In this regard, we express our deep concern that the chemical weapons issues of the Syrian Arab Republic remain unresolved even after ten years of its accession to the Convention. The findings of the third Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) Report earlier this year on the use of chemical weapons in Douma are significantly worrisome. Alongside the allegations of the use of chemical weapons, clarification of Syria's initial declaration is still hampered despite the recent resumption of rounds of consultations with the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) after more than two years of impediments.

We appreciate the ongoing efforts of the Technical Secretariat to investigate the alleged incidents impartially and professionally. Furthermore, we strongly urge Syria to immediately cooperate with the TS to redress the situation and comply with the Convention, decisions of the OPCW Policy-Making Organs, and the relevant UN Security Council resolution. The international community must take appropriate action to ensure Syria's compliance with its obligation under the Convention. In this context, my delegation fully supports the draft decision as a co-sponsor and asks all States Parties to render their support.

The Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine has also raised grave concerns about the possibility of misuse of toxic chemicals and, particularly, the alleged use of riot control agents (RCA) as a method of warfare by Russia. We encourage the Technical Secretariat to closely monitor the situation in Ukraine and request it remains vigilant in addressing any possible use of chemical weapons in violation of the CWC.

Given the growing possibility of misuse of toxic chemicals and chemical terrorism, the importance of chemical safety and security cannot be overemphasized. The Republic of Korea has been making its utmost effort to share its knowledge and best practices for the peaceful development and use of chemistry in the Asian region by co-hosting annual workshops with the TS in Seoul since 2012. The 11th Workshop was successfully held this October, and we reaffirm our commitment to contribute to further enhancing regional capacity in the chemical industry sector.

Mr. Chair,

Keeping the OPCW fit for purpose is one of the top priorities to which States Parties should pay greater attention. In this vein, we would like to reiterate the importance of securing qualified and professional staff for the Technical Secretariat based on broader geographical representation and a more flexible human resources policy. We appreciate the in-depth consultation among States Parties on these matters and sincerely welcome the draft decisions on the Action Plan on Geographical Representation and on the Tenure Policy.

We also support consultations on engagement with civil society given its expertise in the chemical-related fields and active role within the OPCW. We look forward to seeking on-going consultation on this matter, which provides an excellent opportunity to devise concrete ways to strengthen cooperation with civil society and the OPCW.

Fostering gender equality is another critical topic that requires substantial progress at the Organisation. We request that the TS and all States Parties redouble their efforts to take into account gender equality in the implementation of all activities under the Convention and in the composition of the TS.

Mr. Chair,

While all declared stockpiles have now been destroyed, we should not stop our efforts to prevent potential chemical threats and ensure the effective implementation of the CWC. Against this backdrop, my delegation highlights the significance of ensuring the universality of the Convention and urges the four remaining States not Party to join as early as possible without any preconditions. We request that the TS improve its readiness to take in new members and strengthen its efforts to facilitate the engagement of States not Party.

Thank you. /END/