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Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons

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Madam Chair, Director-General, Distinguished Delegates, OPCW and CWC Coalition Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am pleased to be able to speak on behalf of Green Cross International and our CWC Coalition, an effort to promote public awareness of the Chemical Weapons Convention and to facilitate the productive involvement of civil society, including non-governmental organizations, academia, experts, and industry in the CWC and its implementing agency, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

Madam Chair,

The OPCW deserves much congratulations for two major recent breakthroughs: (1) the safe and timely demilitarization of another large stockpile of chemical agents, weapons, precursor chemicals, and related facilities in Syria; and (2) the global acknowledgement with the Nobel Peace Prize just one year ago of the importance of abolition of a whole class of weapons of mass destruction. I was very grateful to be able to join our OPCW colleagues and Director-General Ahmet Uzumcu in Oslo last year, and let me reiterate my congratulations to all of our OPCW colleagues and delegations for this well-deserved recognition.

I also want to express my congratulations to Dr. Robert Matthews from Australia and Dr. Paula Vanninen and her Finnish colleagues at VERIFIN for their much deserved OPCW-The Hague awards yesterday. Dr. Matthews also deserves much credit for contributing his financial award to the Chemical Weapons Survivors Fund at the OPCW; the CWC Coalition now would encourage the Technical Secretariat to begin to use these funds for timely and productive projects with chemical warfare survivors.

Madam Chair,

The accession of the Syrian Arab Republic last year as the 190th CWC State Party has been an historic moment in the strengthening of the global chemical weapons abolition regime. I want to note the importance of the many CWC States Parties who contributed to this ambitious undertaking to safely secure, transport, and eliminate the 1,308 metric tons of declared chemical agents and precursor chemicals in Syria. Of particular note is the timely intervention of both the Russian Federation and the United States of America in facilitating the accession of Syria last September to the CWC; as many of us know, we've all helped with both Track I and Track II diplomacy around universality in the Middle East for several years now, so there are many countries and individuals who deserve credit for this important step forward in global security.

I also want to acknowledge the important contributions of Denmark, Norway, and the United States for committing their ships to sea transport and neutralization of most of Syria's chemical stockpile; we know that these ships and crews spent much more time in and around the Mediterranean than initially planned, so this was a critical commitment on their part. Also deserving mention are the two dozen or more countries who have contributed to the OPCW Trust Fund, raising over 50 million Euros for these operations. And I want to note the important cooperation of Syria as well for its efforts to secure and safely transport these many chemical stocks to the port of Latakia.

Madam Chair,

It is now important not only to continue to push forward with completing the verified destruction of Syria's former production and storage facilities, but to also resolving any outstanding discrepancies in Syria's CWC declaration. I must also underline the importance of continuing the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission to better understand the recent use of chlorine as a chemical weapon in Syria. And now that one of the few remaining non-member countries has joined the CWC, it is incumbent on both government and non-government organizations and individuals to press the remaining two non-member states in the Middle East, along with the other four in Africa and Asia, to join the global ban on chemical weapons. These weapons are now totally taboo, precluding any possible use by a State, and there no longer remains any excuse for any State to remain outside the CWC. The CWC Coalition and Green Cross just last month organized a roundtable discussion in Tel Aviv, Israel, and in the Knesset in Jerusalem, to discuss options for Israel to ratify the CWC; such efforts must continue.

Madam Chair,

I would be remiss if I did not also mention the importance of involving civil society in the ongoing work of the CWC and OPCW. The CWC Coalition, which we founded five years ago here in The Hague, has been successful in involving about 150 NGOs and experts from every continent of the globe now, thanks especially to the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs which has helped fund our recent efforts. We all must recognize that the continued and expanded involvement of non-governmental experts in the works of the OPCW remains very important to a strong and effective organization in future years, and to precluding the re-emergence of chemical weapons around the globe.

On a final note, I would like to acknowledge the excellent work of an OPCW colleague, Mr. Michael Luhan, head of Media and Public Affairs, who will be leaving the OPCW in the next few months. Mr. Luhan has been a major reason our CWC Coalition efforts have been so successful to date and deserves our sincere and lasting thanks.

Thank you for your kind attention, and I wish for this statement to be made part of the final CSP record.