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Mr. Chairperson, Director General, Distinguished Delegates, CWC Coalition Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honor today for me to speak at this Plenary Session of the 21st Conference of State Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention on behalf of the Society for Chemical Weapons Victims Support (SCWVS) and the Tehran Peace Museum, from Iran.

I would like to begin by expressing our appreciation for the ongoing efforts of the OPCW Director General, Ambassador Üzümcü and the Technical Secretariat, as well as all State Parties in advancing the goals of the Chemical Weapons Convention including the elimination of the existing stockpiles of chemical weapons. Since coming into force in 1997, the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) can be regarded as a solid role model for other disarmament treaties.

Excellencies,

However, despite the existence of the CWC and the fact that there are – today – 192 States Parties to this crucial Convention, the use of CW has sadly not gone away. We only need to turn on the news to see that chemical weapons are being used in current international and non-international armed conflicts as well as in terrorist attacks. This is particularly the case in the Middle East – where the threat and use can no longer be ignored and requires immediate action of all the involved parties. We members of the SCWVS express our grave concern of the use of CW by non-state actors in our region. We speak from our own experiences. That, in fact, is why we are here today.

We continue to live with the consequences of many tons of various types of chemical warfare agents used against my people during the Iran-Iraq. The result was tens of thousands of victims with progressive and long-lasting health effects. This, for us, is a tragedy. But, our objective is not to wallow in self-pity but to use our history to help motivate the global community to collaborate in banning the production and the use of such heinous weapons through the CWC.

Mr. Director General,

Following the decision of the 16th session of the CSP to the CWC in 2011, the International Support Network for Victims of CW and a Voluntary Trust Fund for the victims were established. In 2014 and 2015, two of the winners of the OPCW-The Hague Award generously

donated their cash prize to this trust fund. Victims of CW – including those in Iran – benefit greatly from this Voluntary Trust Fund. The SCWVS is grateful for such support and thanks all States Parties in continuing to contribute to this fund. We also acknowledge the vital support from the Technical Secretariat of the OPCW and their valuable attention to the welfare of the existing victims of chemical weapons. Members of the SCWVS in Iran would like to propose that – in developing further support for victims of CW – the registration of all Iranian victims of chemical weapons on the SCWVS website is supported by the OPCW.

Excellencies,

OPCW's ultimate goal is the elimination of all chemical weapons in order to ensure a peaceful world for future generations. As the Director-General himself expressed during his visit to Poland on November 8th, 2016, "There is no alternative to peace." To achieve peace, however, we must all cooperate in raising awareness about the consequences of the use of CW. Only when the general public are aware of what happens when CW are used and how victims are forced to endure a lifetime of suffering, can global and public condemnation of the use of CW lead to their abolition and eventual promotion of a culture of peace. At the Tehran Peace Museum, we have contributed to this awareness-raising approach by developing our own two-fold approach through our Oral History Project and our Volunteer Guide Program. The Oral History Project is centered around Iranian survivors of chemical attacks during the Iran-Iraq War, who are willing to share their stories and experiences with the specific objective of a call to ban CW. Their stories are recorded in English and Persian and are available on our website.

Similarly, the CW survivors of the war volunteer as Tehran Peace Museum guides empowered to educate visitors – and especially the youth of Iran – about the dire consequences of chemical warfare and the necessity for promoting a culture of peace.

Finally, ladies and gentlemen, please allow me to invite one of the Iranian Chemical Weapons survivors, Mr. Hamid Salehi, who was exposed to mustard gas in 1986, to share some of his personal reflections with you:

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have lived as a victim of mustard gas for 30 years. For me, the most important things in life – going to university, getting married, raising a family, and pursuing my career as a teacher – has been spent as a victim. But I'm not living in the past. I'm working for the future. I am proud to be a messenger of peace. Co-founding the Tehran Peace Museum was a milestone for me. Not only have I volunteered there for many years in sharing my experiences with visitors, but I have also learned much. I have learned from other victims, from visitors, from young volunteers and from our international partners. Therefore, I believe that the voice of the victims, who are spreading the message of peace should be heard all around the world. Only by collective efforts, can we achieve a world free of chemical weapons. Until that day, let's inspire each other every day. Thank you.

Thank you for your attention, and I ask that this statement be considered an official document of this Conference and posted on the external server and website.