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Statement by Ambassador (ret.) S. Batsanov at the 22d Conference of States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention on behalf of Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs.

The Hague, ... November 2017

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Director General, Excellencies, distinguished delegates, esteemed CWC Coalition Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to speak, once again, at this distinguished forum on behalf of the Pugwash.

The debates at the conference cover a number of important issues relating to the Chemical Weapons Convention, some of them encouraging, and some other deeply troubling. In order to save everybody's time, I would limit my comments to only three of them.

1. Successful completion of the Russian CW destruction programme.

This is one of the most significant achievements on the road to global chemical disarmament. Those of us who were dealing with the CWC 20 years ago – in 1997 - would recall that there were wide-spread doubts, not just in Russia, but in many other countries, about this day ever coming. On 28 September Pugwash issued a statement welcoming this important achievement, and I would quote a couple of its elements.

"...the fact that Russia decided to bring its chemical arsenal down to zero without waiting for another major possessor – the US – to do the same, shows that strong belief in the deterrent role of these weapons, which used to be an important factor during negotiations on the Chemical Weapons Ban in Geneva, can give way to mutual trust, developed step-by-step in the process of treaty implementation..."

and...

"Now the goal of a chemical-weapons-free-world is much nearer. To achieve it, it is necessary to accelerate the destruction of chemical weapons elsewhere, to ensure the 100% universality of the Chemical Weapons Convention, and to further improve safeguards against any re-emergence of chemical weapons on the basis of traditional and new technologies and against any attempts by any actors to get hold of or to use these prohibited weapons."

(Full text of this Pugwash statement, dated 28 September 2017, is available at <https://pugwash.org/2017/09/28/pugwash-welcomes-the-completion-of-chemical-weapons-destruction-by-russia/>)

And, to conclude on this subject, - a personal consideration, if I may: it may make sense to prepare and publish a serious academic book on the history of chemical demilitarization efforts under the CWC by a group of scholars and practitioners and with an active involvements of the Secretariat, which now possesses a wealth of information

(sometimes, protected, unfortunately). Such a book should, in my view, focus on Russian and American chemdemil programmes, but, if possible, could also address other countries' efforts, as well as the role of international cooperation in this area.

2. Looking beyond chemical disarmament and the CWC Review Conference of 2018

This second paragraph of the Pugwash statement, which I quoted a moment ago, is just a very brief, condensed reference to the many tasks and challenges ahead, which we hope should be addressed systematically, with open minds and without ignoring the current tasks, which still must be completed – like finalising CW destruction or achieving universality. This should not be based on the search for innovations for the sake of innovations. But equally, I appeal to all, involved in this work, to understand, that without innovation, without adjusting or at least critically reviewing important details of the CWC regime in order to react to new realities, the regime runs the risk of losing relevance to today's life. It would be less needed, less known about at the political level in states parties and among the civil society.

The up-coming review conference at the end of the next year, as well as the preparations for it, offer a good opportunity for such much needed work. There is no need to rush; but we need a comprehensive framework for identification and approaching new realities in order to find working political, legal and operational solutions.

There many ideas and suggestions around. Among them I would mention the Report of the Advisory group on the OPCW Future priorities, issued 25 July 2011 (https://www.opcw.org/fileadmin/OPCW/PDF/Advisory_Group_report_s-951-2011_e.pdf)

As one of the authors of that report, I am happy that the Director General Ahmet Üzümcü made a reference to it in his statement to our conference on Monday. Except for some technical details, which may have become out of date and administrative proposals already implemented, it is still largely relevant.

I am sure we will all be able to succeed with this review, provided the work is done collectively, cooperatively and with due respect to the foundations of the convention and to the interests of all states parties.

This takes me to the third and the last point.

3. Chemical weapons in Syria.

This issue has become, and not only at this conference, a subject of a heavy-handed debate, which is threatening to undermine the foundations of the OPCW. Especially it concerns the so-called question of accountability. This is a cause for a serious concern.

It goes without saying that, like everybody else, Pugwash is resolutely condemning any use of chemical weapons or other toxic chemicals as weapons. It is a hideous crime, no matter who does it. And there must be consequences – after due course of investigation. But we, of course, do not possess our own ways of knowing who is guilty, and who is not. And we do not claim we know everything. But we are concerned about the course of events.

OPCW is for the first time in its history involved in such investigations. The conditions on the ground and the circumstances of alleged use are such, that, frankly speaking, had not been envisaged during the CWC negotiations. I can testify to that.

In the comments delivered here last year I highlighted “the fact that for many players the question of accountability was subordinate to their key and uncompromising objectives in the Syrian war”. Unfortunately, events since then do not testify to the disappearance of this problem. Such situations always gives rise to the lack of trust, suspicions and unlimited imagination

This means that in the process of investigation should be such as to minimize the risk of not just irregularities – like non-compliance with chain-of-custody rules, or even the risk of perceived irregularities – which very well may occur under existing conditions, ensure that decisions to visit or not to visit certain places, like the site of suspected use or the airport implicated with the use, are substantiated and logical. There is a need to reduce the risks of bias and perceived bias through a well calibrated organizational and personnel solutions. And all that without sacrificing the necessary confidentiality of the process. I have mentioned just a couple of issues requiring vary careful consideration; in reality there are many more. They require not just technical, but also political solutions. And the only way to address them productively is to resume dialogue. It is encouraging, that many delegations mentioned the need of dialogue – many delegations, standing on the opposite side of this unfortunate political divide, which is hurting today the OPCW. I do not know, it is a very personal idea – maybe, a thought should be given to putting together a group of “wise” men to develop in more detail possible proposals on this delicate subject. What will not help, is a continuation of the current acrimonious “dialogue of the deaf”.

Thank you very much, and let me wish all of you very successful work. I also hope it would be possible for this statement to be included, as appropriate, in the final record of this CSP and posted on the OPCW external server and website.