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Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)
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Mr Chairman, Mr Director General, Distinguished Delegates and Guests,

Thank you for providing me and many of the non-governmental organizations present at this Conference of States Parties with this opportunity to speak briefly about work in their home countries.

The chemical weapons demilitarization program in Pueblo progresses slowly. This program is designed to destroy some 780,000 mustard-filled chemical weapons through the use of water neutralization and bio-treatment. Under the auspices of the Assembled Chemical Weapons Alternatives Program and the United States Department of Defense, the Pueblo Chemical Agent-Destruction Pilot Project, commonly known as PCAPP, is carrying out to the greatest extent possible, the principles of citizen involvement and transparency.

Mr. Chairman,

The Pueblo community, once in great opposition to the incineration of the weapons stored at the Pueblo Chemical Depot, is now comfortable with the neutralization-biotreatment facility that was constructed in the Pueblo community and where destruction has begun. There is no fear, no anger, and no distrust of the process. It has been replaced with understanding and knowledge. This is what the principles of communication and transparency has accomplished.

The mission of this program is like all chemical demilitarization programs: to fully destroy the stockpiled chemical weapons in a safe manner. Where there is a difference from many programs is the four hallmarks of this program: transparency; community and citizen involvement; education of the workers and public; and safety of the workers, the community and the environment. These four principles have transformed the Pueblo community and in many ways the Department of Defense.

Transparency is one of the most important aspects of the program. The citizens of Pueblo continue to have input into almost every aspect of the program. Currently we are meeting to discuss a series of “what ifs” in dealing with the long-term sustainability of the program. The question to be answered is “How to maintain the program at a full operations level throughout the destruction process?” And the subsequent questions are “What should be done if one or more of the units fail?” “What are the criteria to determine success or failure?” and “What are the alternatives?” These are no easy answers and the community discussion is on-going.

Community and citizen involvement came into being with the establishment of Citizens’ Advisory Commissions by the United States Congress in all communities where chemical weapons stockpiles existed. Creating commissions, however, did not insure communication. Members had to be tenacious, ask questions, and be willing to argue and to speak up. Everyone had to have a voice and every question had to be taken seriously. Today the Citizens Advisory Commission in Pueblo is an active citizens’ group, trusted by the community, state and federal regulators and the Department of Defense.

Public meetings and tours of the construction site were also a hallmark of community involvement and education. Now, with operations on-going, tours are limited to the Training facility or virtual tours made possible by YouTube and discussions with subject matter experts.

An outreach office is located in the Pueblo community, where citizens can walk in and view displays and take away program information. An educational specialist regularly goes into the schools to teach about chemical weapons and the destruction programs. They teach about job opportunities to the older students, as well as the history of chemical warfare, chemistry, math, engineering and physics. Children down to the age of 10 learn about these programs and bring valuable information home to their parents. The ACWA program has a website where anyone can look up information, view pictures and watch YouTube videos about the processes.

The final cornerstone of the program is the most important to the community - safety. Facility workers, our husbands and wives, sons and daughters, fathers and mothers and neighbors work at a facility that is as safe or safer today than most manufacturing

facilities in the world. The surrounding environment remains unimpaired while destruction of the weapons continues. The workers are safe, the nearby residents are safe and the environment is protected. Vigilance will be kept throughout operations as these factors must not be compromised in the interest of rapid destruction of the chemical weapons in the stockpile.

Mr. Chairman,

Early in the Assembled Chemical Weapons Alternative Programs, and I suspect in some areas even today, the concept of providing communities with the tools to assist the Department of Defense and Department of the Army in making decisions was very controversial. The issue was power and the idea that power and ideas had to be closely held and not shared. Few could conceive of the idea of providing transparency and education to citizens without losing power. Today, transparency, education and mutual understanding of decisions has led to shared power and increased power for our leaders, because they know that the decision is made by all people involved.

Mr Chairman,

Meeting the criteria of transparency, community involvement, education and safety has allowed the ACWA program, the community and the Department of Defense to work together with the Pueblo community to build a program that meets the needs of everyone by employing face-to-face discussion and consensus and will result in the safe destruction in Pueblo of the stockpile and all secondary components of the stockpile.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to provide you with a glimpse into the chemical weapons destruction program in Pueblo.