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Mr. Chairman, Director-General, Distinguished Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Much of the focus of the CWC meetings over the last few years has been on its numerous accomplishments, as well as on issues of contention, including the need to seek accountability for proven violations of the Convention, by any actor. As a proud member of the CWC Coalition, Biosecure aligns with and fully endorses the statement delivered by Mr Paul Walker of Green Cross International which ably covers these issues. We would like to focus our remarks on the matter of assistance for victims of the use of chemicals as weapons and their families – an issue that frequently tends to get lost amid the current political debate.

Mr. Chairman,

At its heart, the Convention's efforts to prevent the use of chemical weapons is a humanitarian endeavor that strives to protect and preserve human life. Considerable effort is being made to prevent further casualties from the use of chemical weapons, but the sad fact is that currently the number of chemical weapons casualties is increasing – and many of those affected will likely require long-term medical and psycho-social aid. The CWC and OPCW have made positive efforts to respond to the need to provide assistance to chemical weapons survivors, but more can, and should, be done.

Firstly, as noted in the Practical Guide for Medical Management of Chemical Warfare Casualties on the OPCW website, it is well known that chemical weapons victims often suffer long-term health consequences as a direct result of their exposure to chemical weapons, including chronic illness and delayed effects. However, these long-term effects are the least known and less well understood and little work has been done to clarify and consolidate the medical data in this regard. In our view, the future programme of work of the CWC should include a comprehensive study to investigate and better understand the longer-term effects of chemical weapons which would thus enable the provision of adequate and appropriate medical and other assistance to those in need. The Practical Guide for Medical Management of Chemical Warfare Casualties should then be updated to reflect this new information.

Secondly, victim assistance efforts in other disarmament domains—such as in the field of anti-personnel landmines and cluster munitions—have shown that survivor peer-to-peer networks have had a significantly positive and long-lasting effect on the quality of life enjoyed by survivors of armed violence and their families and communities. Updating the information contained on the 'International Support Network for Victims of Chemical Weapons' webpage in a user-friendly manner with relevant and useful information that specifically feeds into the networks from other disarmament fields and other treaties such as the Convention on the Rights of Person with Disabilities (CPRD) could have a profound impact on the lives of chemical weapons survivors – and could be done at minimal cost.

Mr. Chairman,

The OPCW's annual Day of Remembrance of All Victims of Chemical Warfare and monument serves as an important reminder of the lessons of our past and our humanitarian responsibility to prevent the use of chemical weapons in the future. However, with new casualties from the use of chemical weapons occurring each year it is time to move beyond remembrance ceremonies and prioritize action. Biosecure urges all States Parties to provide increased support to the International Support Network through contributions to the voluntary trust fund and to provide appropriate and sustained assistance to victims of chemical weapons.

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