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THE SWISS CONFEDERATION

MAKING THE CHEMICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION WORK: THE SWISS CONTRIBUTION

For Switzerland, the Chemical Weapons Convention (hereinafter the “Convention”) represents a disarmament milestone. It has established the norms and provided tools for those willing to prevent the recurrence of chemical warfare, and provides a framework for their cooperation. It is for the States Parties to lend substance to the letter of the treaty. This paper outlines how Switzerland has implemented the Convention both nationally and in cooperation with partners from other States Parties and the Technical Secretariat (hereinafter the “Secretariat”).

National Implementation

Switzerland has enacted and amended several laws and regulations to bring its legislation into conformity with the Convention. This process was completed by 1 April 1998. (In the period leading up to that date, a federal decree provided the legal basis for national implementation.) Subsequent decisions taken by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) were translated into national law by revising the relevant regulations. The first revision took effect on 13 February 2001.

The Swiss National Authority was established by government decision on 25 November 1996. It is an inter-ministerial working group, which meets twice a year on an official level. Work is distributed ad hoc between the three Ministries concerned (Departments of Foreign Affairs, Economic Affairs, and Defence / Civil Protection).

Implementation Support

Switzerland organises biennial conferences on the implementation of the Convention in the framework of the Partnership for Peace programme. So far, almost 100 participants from 30 countries used this forum to discuss implementation matters with colleagues from the Euro-Atlantic region. In addition, Swiss experts shared their experience with colleagues from other regions at visits and seminars held in Austria, Cuba, Germany, Iran, Morocco, Singapore, Slovakia, and South Africa.



The Swiss National Authority also renders declaration and inspection assistance to the Principality of Liechtenstein, which forms a customs union with Switzerland.

Capacity-building for Verification

Recognising that the effectiveness and credibility of the verification regime depends, to a large degree, on the competence of inspectors, Switzerland set up a training programme – the Swiss Programme for OPCW Inspector Training (SWISSPOINT) – prior to entry into force of the Convention. The first course was held in March 1997 and focused on industrial verification. The Swiss chemical industry contributed significantly to this programme by providing facilities for practical exercises and bearing part of the costs. Over the years, a total of 108 inspectors has undergone training in Switzerland. Furthermore Switzerland has organised three training courses on interview techniques in 2000 and 2002.

Switzerland also provides technical expertise to the OPCW. Spiez Laboratory, the Swiss NBC defence establishment, has been one of the OPCW's designated laboratories since November 1998. It has synthesised and analysed hundreds of substances and supplied the results to the OPCW Central Analytical Databank. Spiez Laboratory is prepared to analyse samples collected by the OPCW for the purpose of verification. It has also provided technical support and expertise to the OPCW Laboratory in Rijswijk.

Supporting Chemical Disarmament

Although it does not possess any chemical weapons, Switzerland is keen to make its own contribution to chemical disarmament. Since the early 1990s, it supported the Chemtrust programme of Green Cross International, a non-government organisation located in Geneva. The Chemtrust programme aims to facilitate chemical weapons destruction through building public awareness. It runs several local public outreach offices in the Russian Federation, providing independent and objective information to the population living around chemical weapons stockpiles.

In a Swiss-Albanian cooperation project, about 20 tons of old toxic military chemicals were destroyed on the premises of the Albanian NBC Protection Regiment north of Tirana, during the spring and summer of 2001.

The Swiss Parliament has now approved more funds (17 million Swiss francs) for supporting worldwide chemical disarmament, during the 2003-2008 period. Switzerland aims to make a direct contribution to chemical weapons destruction and thus enhance international security and minimise environmental risks.

International Cooperation

Spiez Laboratory has participated in the OPCW internship programme. During the spring and summer of 2000, an organic chemist from South Africa spent four months in Spiez to learn about synthetic and analytical methods used in a designated laboratory; a second internship is planned for 2003.

The OPCW Associate Programme, which began in 2000, has met a positive response from the Swiss chemical industry, which hosted two participants for the first time in 2002 and will host another two participants in 2003.

Assistance and Protection

Under the terms of Article X, Switzerland has contributed to the voluntary fund for assistance and committed itself to providing material and expertise in response to an appeal from the OPCW. The Swiss offer includes individual and collective means of protection, medical treatment and decontamination for up to 10,000 civilians, three mobile laboratories, and NBC-defence instructors.

When an emergency occurs, there will be little time for national protection experts to familiarise themselves with the material delivered from abroad. They need to be trained in advance. Switzerland has thus organised a series of courses at its NBC Training Centre in Spiez: The Chief Instructor Training Programme (CITPRO) provides basic training in detection, decontamination, and civilian CW protection. Six courses were held for a total of 206 participants, mainly from developing countries, since 1998. The Swiss Emergency-Field-Laboratory Training Programme (SEF-LAB) provides basic training in the analysis of chemical agents in air, soil, and water. So far, six courses were held for a total of 89 participants, a seventh course is currently going on, and the first advanced course (SEF-TRAD) for 26 participants took place in December 2002. The main purpose of the CITPRO and SEF-LAB and SEF-TRAD programmes is to assist other States Parties in their efforts to establish a basic CW protection capability, which will directly benefit their civilian population. Four regional training courses co-organised with Sweden and financed by Norway will take place this year in Central Asia and Azerbaijan.

Switzerland also participated to the “ASSISTEX 1” exercise on assistance delivery organised by the OPCW in Zadar (Croatia) in 2002. Dispatched directly on site by a transport helicopter with protective and detection equipment, a four-member Swiss team of instructors trained the local population and first responders in the use of individual protective equipment. They searched out and removed individuals from the contaminated area.

The Fifth Annual Assistance Co-ordination Workshop was held in Geneva in November 2002 under Swiss auspices. This format brought together humanitarian organisations (such as WHO, UNOCHA and WFP) for sharing operational experiences, in particular with a view to improving co-ordination and complementary response capacity in the field. Participants observed a one-day Swiss exercise for the training of first responders and intervention groups in a simulated terrorist attack using nerve agents.

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