



**OPCW**

**Conference of the States Parties**

Third Review Conference  
8 – 19 April 2013

RC-3/NAT.23  
9 April 2013  
ENGLISH and FRENCH only

**BELGIUM**

**STATEMENT BY H.E. MR WERNER BAUWENS  
SPECIAL ENVOY FOR DISARMAMENT AND NON-PROLIFERATION  
AT THE THIRD REVIEW CONFERENCE**

Mr Chairman,  
Director-General,  
Distinguished delegates,

I would like to congratulate you on your election as Chairman of the Third Review Conference of the Chemical Weapons Convention. I can assure you of my country's full cooperation in your efforts to lead this meeting to a successful conclusion.

Let me also express gratitude to the Chair of the open-ended working group on the preparation of this Conference, Ambassador Nassima Baghli of Algeria, for her valuable preparatory work.

Belgium fully aligns itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union.

Allow me to briefly address some areas of specific interest to my country.

I noted with some emotion the reference made by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, as well as by the Foreign Minister of the Netherlands, to the first massive use of chemical weapons in the Belgian town of Ypres almost a century ago. This caused unprecedented human suffering during one of the world's bloodiest conflicts, which is still remembered during a simple but impressive daily ceremony under the Menin Gate. In 2015, Belgium will remember and we intend to organise an international conference to which we would like to associate the OPCW and its Director-General, whom I salute for his leadership and awareness-raising efforts. The tens of thousands of visitors to Ypres, town of peace just like The Hague, want to remember and, through this, send out the strongest possible message: never again. Never again should chemical weapons be used. Never again should so many human beings become victims of these indiscriminate weapons of mass destruction.

And this, Mr Chairman, is the real reason why we are here today: to reaffirm the viability of a Convention that prohibits these weapons, guarantees the destruction of existing stockpiles and ensures that, never again, will chemical weapons be used, by none and under no circumstances.

We hope that this Third Review Conference will be the opportunity for all States Parties to recommit to the object and purpose of the Chemical Weapons Convention and to strengthen



the process of its full implementation. This process not only requires full compliance by all States Parties of all their obligations, but also a shared view of the path forward for our collective endeavour.

Over the years, we have made tremendous headway, notably in the field of the destruction of chemical weapons stockpiles as well as the destruction or conversion of former chemical weapons production facilities. Even though we have not yet reached the final conclusion of this process, a clear path towards it has been set out. My country, because of history, is aware of the fact that chemical weapons destruction is a complex, expensive and time-consuming process. Belgian experts at our destruction site are still daily coping with the remnants of old chemical weapons that continue to be found in Flanders Fields. We are confident that solutions to problems of the past will be found. And thus, we should as of now gradually shift our attention to ensure that the Convention is capable of addressing also the future challenges and threats, in particular the issue of re-emergence of chemical weapons.

Our global environment has changed profoundly since the Convention was signed. Science and technology have advanced rapidly. Biology and chemistry interact in new ways and these innovations require appropriate answers. The OPCW has to adapt to these developments, which carry both the benefit of scientific progress and growing trade volumes, as well as the increased risk of diversion and abuse. The verification regime has to reflect the changes in the scientific and technological environment, including, where necessary, a recalibration of its functioning. Ensuring effective site selection is of great importance: we must focus on facilities that are relevant and thus wisely spend our resources, in particular in the context of continued budget constraints. The regime will also benefit from a strong cooperative relationship with industry. I would like to express my deep appreciation for the contribution of industry, the science community and interested civil society to promoting and achieving the goals and objectives of our treaty. At a side event this morning, cosponsored by Belgium, the EU Institute for Security Studies presented its recent study on the future of the Chemical Weapons Convention in the post-destruction phase. I value this type of interaction and the thorough research efforts put into the study. I also endorse the Director-General's resolve to find ways of ensuring continuity in the OPCW knowledge base and expertise as part of the future priorities of his organisation.

Despite the overwhelming success of the Convention, the objective of universal adherence has not yet been achieved. The crucial importance of this issue was sadly illustrated by Syria's admission, last year, that it has a stockpile of chemical weapons and by its threat to use these weapons under certain circumstances. Along with the international community, Belgium is seriously concerned by these developments which have serious implications for regional and international peace and security. We remind Syria of the prohibition of the use of chemical weapons by international customary law and by the 1925 Geneva Protocol. Their use is totally unacceptable and would have dire consequences. Apart from the very troubling policy statement by the Syrian regime, the current situation on the ground calls for our greatest attention. There is uncertainty about the safety and security of the chemical weapons sites. Also the risk of chemical weapons being spread beyond Syrian borders, and possibly falling into the hands of non-state actors, has to be addressed.

We welcome the decision of the United Nations Secretary-General to launch an official investigation of the alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria and the setting up of an international expert team. We appreciate the assistance given by the Director-General of the OPCW to this process. We underline the importance of a full, timely and impartial

investigation of all allegations. We urge all parties in Syria to unconditionally lend their full support and to grant safe and unhindered access to the members of the investigation team.

The Syrian case should prompt us to redouble our efforts towards the universalisation of the Convention. It also lends urgency to the call for progress on the issue of establishing a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East.

The very worrying situation in Syria touches upon the essence of this Convention. The Third Review Conference should therefore deal with the issue and include in its report renewed calls upon Syria to adhere to the Chemical Weapons Convention and to destroy its stockpiles under international verification.

Just like the people of the town of Ypres and its many visitors from around the globe, so must we at this conference remember the horrors of the past and conclude: never again, by none and under no circumstances, shall chemical weapons be used.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.

I would kindly ask you to consider this statement as an official document of the third review conference.

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