

**NOTE BY THE TECHNICAL SECRETARIAT****CONFERENCE ON COUNTERING CHEMICAL TERRORISM  
OPCW HEADQUARTERS  
THE HAGUE, THE NETHERLANDS  
7 AND 8 JUNE 2018****BACKGROUND**

1. The threat of the use by non-State actors of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) is a critical challenge facing the international community. OPCW States Parties have long recognised the threat posed to the Chemical Weapons Convention (hereinafter “the Convention”) by non-State actors, and have underlined that the full and effective implementation of all provisions of the Convention is in itself a contribution to global counter-terrorism efforts.<sup>1</sup>
2. At the Third Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties to Review the Operation of the Chemical Weapons Convention, in 2013, States Parties declared their determination to increase their efforts to guard against the possible hostile use of toxic chemicals by non-State actors such as terrorists and noted with concern that the international community faces the danger of the production, acquisition, and use of chemical weapons by these actors.<sup>2</sup>
3. The heightened awareness of the threat of the terrorist use of chemical weapons led, in October 2017, to the adoption of a decision “Addressing the Threat Posed by the Use of Chemical Weapons by Non-State Actors”.<sup>3</sup> In this decision, the OPCW Executive Council (hereinafter “the Council”) recognised the fundamental threat posed to the object and purpose of the Convention by the development, acquisition, and use of chemical weapons by non-State actors, and decided upon a number of measures designed to prevent and respond to chemical terrorism. This decision marks a significant step in the OPCW’s efforts to mitigate the threat posed to the Convention and to the security of its States Parties by chemical terrorism. Its implementation will be an important component of the OPCW’s work for the foreseeable future.

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<sup>1</sup> EC-XXVII/DEC.5 (dated 7 December 2001) establishing the Open-Ended Working Group on Terrorism.

<sup>2</sup> Paragraphs 9.11 and 9.27 of RC-3/3\* (dated 19 April 2013).

<sup>3</sup> EC-86/DEC.9 (dated 13 October 2017).



4. Through its action against chemical terrorism, the OPCW contributes to the overall counter-terrorism framework as championed by the United Nations, taking into full consideration the larger context of CBRN<sup>4</sup> threats.

#### **INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE**

5. To focus global attention on the threat of chemical terrorism and to discuss strengthening international cooperation on countering that threat, on 7 and 8 June 2018 the OPCW Technical Secretariat will organise an international conference on countering chemical terrorism. The conference will take place at OPCW Headquarters in The Hague.
6. The conference will be open to government officials, international and regional organisations engaged in countering chemical or WMD terrorism, as well as to academics, industry representatives, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) with a special interest in this field. Participation of capital-based officials is strongly encouraged. Simultaneous interpretation into all six official languages of the OPCW will be provided.

#### **Strategic objectives**

7. The conference will have the following strategic objectives:
  - (a) to better understand the threat of chemical terrorism and global vulnerabilities;
  - (b) to highlight the OPCW's role as the key global forum for addressing the threat of chemical terrorism and the Convention as an instrument that contributes significantly to countering chemical weapons use by non-State actors;
  - (c) to expose key national and international actors and opinion leaders to the Convention's actual and potential contribution in this regard;
  - (d) in respect of the Fourth Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties to Review the Operation of the Chemical Weapons Convention, to consider approaches to Convention implementation (including in capacity building and verification) that enhance its contribution to global counter-terrorism efforts, and to take forward key elements from the recent Council decision on Non-State Actors (EC-86/DEC.9);
  - (e) to promote the OPCW's expertise and capabilities in responding to chemical terrorism, for example, its Rapid Reaction and Assistance Mission (RRAM), chemical (environmental and biological) analysis;
  - (f) to promote national and regional measures, supported by the OPCW, to counter chemical terrorism;
  - (g) to strengthen coherence in approaches to countering chemical terrorism among key international organisations, donors, industry, and NGOs; and

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<sup>4</sup> CBRN = chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear.

- (h) to consider the scientific and technological developments that may have an impact on efforts to combat chemical terrorism.

### **Organisation and key themes**

8. The conference will be split into four main sessions:
  - (a) setting the scene, risks posed by chemical terrorism;
  - (b) preventing chemical terrorism;
  - (c) responding to chemical terrorism; and
  - (d) ensuring the legal accountability of non-State actors.
9. Each session will be action-oriented, drawing on elements of the recent Council decision on non-State actors to guide discussions, and the conference will use panel discussions and interactive elements to enable the airing of a broad range of views.
10. Following the introductory segment featuring an opening address by the Director-General (and a keynote address by a high-profile attendee), the first session of the conference will focus on discussing the risks and vulnerabilities concerning chemical terrorism. Drawing on real-world examples, this session will aim to cover the following themes: the CBRN terrorism threat landscape; the appeal of CBRN for terrorist groups and the technical pathways to a chemical weapons capability for non-State actors; chemical security vulnerabilities around the world; and the scientific and technological landscape – is it helping or hindering the fight against chemical terrorism?
11. The second session, focused on prevention, should address the following: the role and nature of national risk and threat assessments in preventing chemical/WMD terrorism; the role of regulatory reviews in ensuring national frameworks are fit for purpose; the range of national capabilities required for effective prevention (such as border security, export controls, chemical security measures); how counter-proliferation/non-proliferation and counter-terrorism regimes can function more effectively together; how the Convention can contribute to States' efforts to prevent terrorism, including through modern capacity building and the operation of the Convention's verification regime; and the role and benefits of information-sharing on national and regional preventive capabilities.
12. During the third session, focused on response, the range of topics to be addressed will likely include the available international response architecture (including the results of the OPCW-led project within the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force on inter-agency coordination in response); the OPCW's efforts to build its own capability to respond to chemical weapons use by non-State actors (RRAM); the role of national protection programmes; laboratory capabilities and chemical forensics; and first response to real-world use.
13. During the fourth session, focused on legal accountability, the following themes will be explored: the contribution of Convention-implementing legislation to counter-terrorism objectives; the application of the Convention within the broader

international counter-terrorism framework; the operations of the Convention's mutual legal assistance mechanisms and their relevance for countering chemical terrorism; information-sharing on prosecution/disposition of Convention-related offences.

### **Participation**

14. As noted above, the conference will be open to government officials (particularly capital-based), international and regional organisations, and to academics, industry representatives, and NGOs with a special interest in countering chemical or WMD terrorism.
15. States Parties are encouraged to send capital-based officials responsible, inter alia, for counter-terrorism, international security, and international legal issues rather than Convention implementation, as their presence will encourage the injection of new ideas into the discourse surrounding the Convention and terrorism, build synergies at the national and international levels, and promote awareness among new audiences of the contribution the Convention can make to dealing with contemporary security challenges.
16. Invitations to participants from international organisations, NGOs, academia, and think-tanks will be focused on those dealing with counter-terrorism and CBRN issues.

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