

# CWC Review Conference Report

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## The opening of the Review Conference and start of the General Debate

The Fourth five-yearly Review Conference (RC-4) of the of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) was opened on Wednesday by the current Chair of the Conference of States Parties (CSP), Ambassador Yun-young Lee (Republic of Korea), in line with past practice. The Conference then adopted its officers, confirming Ambassador Agustín Vásquez Gómez (El Salvador) as Chair for the Review Conference. Ambassador Marcin Czepelak (Poland) was agreed as Chair of the Committee of the Whole (CoW). Each international treaty regime has its own arrangements for carrying out the line-by-line negotiations of final documents within their review conferences; for the CWC, the drafting work is the responsibility of the CoW which then reports back to the plenary.

OPCW Director-General Fernando Arias then gave his opening statement to the Conference. He contrasted the activities of the regular session of the CSP with those of the Review Conference which he described as having to take ‘the long view’. He described the CWC as being an ‘effective global ban’ with ‘an extraordinary narrative’ which included that over 96 per cent of declared chemical weapons had now been destroyed under international verification. There had been significant milestones since the Third Review Conference (RC-3) with completion of destruction of declared chemical weapons by a major possessor state, Russia. Declared chemical weapons had also been destroyed in Libya and Syria together with remnants of chemical weapons in Iraq and that the United States was on track to complete its chemical weapons destruction in 2023. It was therefore in the relatively near future that the destruction of all declared chemical weapons will be complete, which will be a ‘momentous development’. He noted that with a membership of 193 states parties, the Convention was ‘near-universal’. There had been developments since RC-3 on the issues of assistance and protection and international cooperation and assistance, and he highlighted the creation of the Rapid Response and Assistance Mission (RRAM) designed to aid any state party dealing with a chemical incident caused by a non-state actor. He reminded the Conference of an Executive Council decision from 2017 on addressing the threats from non-state actors. He spoke of the work of the Fact-Finding Mission and the Declaration Assessment Team in Syria. He welcomed the establishment of the Advisory Board on Education and Outreach. Looking to the future, he emphasised that the OPCW needs to be able to uphold the norms embodied within the Convention and have capacities to counter current and future challenges. This included tasks and functions following on from the decision from the CSP Special Session in June. He called the use of nerve agents in Malaysia and the UK and the use of chemical weapons in Iraq and in Syria by non-state actors ‘a chilling reality’. He highlighted that scientific and technological developments impact upon the regime, including verification arrangements, and noted the report of the Scientific Advisory Board and the plans to upgrade the OPCW Laboratory to a Centre of Chemistry and Technology. Concluding his remarks, he said that the OPCW has witnessed an ‘extraordinary and productive past’ and there is no reason for the future to be any different, describing the need to maintain the global norm against use of chemical weapons as ‘a permanent barrier against a form of cruelty that it has taken many generations to banish’.

The UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu conveyed to the Conference a message from the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres.

The message noted that the period since 2013 had been marked by ‘remarkable achievements as well as painful tragedy’. He described the use of chemical weapons as ‘unacceptable’ and stated that ‘the requirement for those responsible to be identified and held accountable is paramount’. The Secretary-General urged those states not yet party to the Convention to join ‘without delay’. He welcomed the work under the Convention to promote chemistry for peace and congratulated the OPCW for receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in 2013.

The Conference was given a brief report from the Chair of the Executive Council, Ambassador Jana Reinišová (Czech Republic) on the preparations for the Review Conference.

### **General Debate**

The General Debate offers the chance for delegations to make statements to outline their positions and started with group statements from: CWC states parties that are members of the Non-Aligned Movement and China; the European Union; and the Africa Group. These were followed by national statements from: Iran, Iraq, Ukraine, Russia, Syria, the Netherlands, Algeria, Germany, Saudi Arabia, New Zealand, Poland, Moldova, Republic of Korea, Brazil, France, Romania, United Arab Emirates, Denmark, Costa Rica, Panama, Switzerland, China, Holy See, Finland and Pakistan. A number of these statements were made by ministerial-level representatives who had travelled to The Hague to make their statements. Although there were time limits indicated, a number of statements went on for much longer than their allotted time.

A wide range of issues were raised. For many of the long-term issues, such as cooperation and assistance under Article XI, there was little change in the detail of what has been raised so far compared with previously expressed positions other than commenting on developments since RC-3. On other issues, such as allegations of use of chemical weapons in Syria there were divergent views and many new details since RC-3. [Note: it is perhaps worth remembering that RC-3 was held in April 2013, barely a month after the first allegations of use of chemical weapons in the territory of Syria had been formally put to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon by the Syrian government (alleging rebel forces had been the user) and by the governments of France and the UK (alleging the Syrian government was the user). Both sets of allegations related to incidents in Khan al-Assal on 19 March 2013 and were the basis on which the investigation team headed by Åke Sellström of Sweden was established by the UN Secretary-General. Syria was not a CWC State Party at the time.] Many statements welcomed the five new states parties that have joined the Convention since the RC-3 – Somalia, Syria, Myanmar, Angola and the State of Palestine – bringing the total to 193 states parties.

However, it is too early to try to identify themes or common threads as there are many speakers waiting to take the floor and it seems the statements could fill Thursday and possibly continue into Friday. Thus at the time of writing, only a small proportion of General Debate statements have been given and so identification general debate themes will be held over to the next daily report.

A number of statements made references to expectations for the Review Conference in general terms, for example, ‘a balanced and consensual outcome’. These are in line with similar statements in General Debates in earlier CWC Review Conferences and it is not possible to draw conclusions this form of data about whether expectations for this Review Conference differ from expectations for earlier Review Conferences at a similar stage in proceedings

*This is the fourth report from the Fourth Review Conference of the Chemical Weapons Convention being held in The Hague 21-30 November 2018, preceded by the 23rd Session of the Conference of States Parties. These reports are prepared for the CWC Coalition, a global network of non-governmental groups with CWC interests, and are available at <<<http://www.cbw-events.org.uk/cwc-rep.html>>>. The author, Richard Guthrie of CBW Events, can be contacted via <<[richard@cbw-events.org.uk](mailto:richard@cbw-events.org.uk)>>.*