

# CWC Review Conference Report

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## The general debate concludes and Friends of the Chair are appointed

Tuesday, the second day of the Fifth CWC Review Conference, started with an announcement by the Chair, Ambassador Henk Cor van der Kwast (Netherlands), of four 'Friends of the Chair' to assist the process of reaching agreement on issues that remain challenging. The allocation of topics is: 'Organisational Governance' facilitated by Ambassador Lauri Kuusing (Estonia); 'Industry Verification' by Ambassador Frances-Galatia Lanitau Williams (Cyprus); 'Addressing the threat from chemical weapons use' by Ambassador Susannah Gordon (New Zealand); and 'Attendance and participation of non-governmental organisations' by Ambassador Andrés Terán (Ecuador). Each of these had initial meetings with interested delegates during the day. There were no apparent breakthroughs, but this is in line with previous experience – this form of activity in multilateral meetings usually takes a few rounds of facilitation for progress to be evident.

The results of the secret ballot on Monday afternoon for the Vice-Chairs from the Eastern European Group were given during the morning – Lithuania 91, North Macedonia 86, Russia 45.

At the end of the day, the Chair announced changes to the timings for plenary sessions on Wednesday to allow for extra working time – 09.30-12.30, 14.00-17.00 and 18.30-21.30. He also announced that an informal group for the preparation of the report (to which regional groups would nominate participants) would be convened by the Chair of the Committee of the Whole, Ambassador José Antonio Zabalgoitia (Mexico). The additional methods of working reflect that one of the challenges for this Review Conference is having only five working days in which to complete its activities.

### **Tuesday speakers in the general debate**

The general debate took up the majority of plenary time during Tuesday. Statements by states parties were given by: Türkiye, Finland, South Africa, Switzerland, Romania, Syria, Qatar, Ethiopia, Chile, New Zealand, Denmark, Estonia, Singapore, Argentina, Croatia, France, United Arab Emirates, Slovenia, Philippines, Czech Republic, Lao PDR, Algeria, Republic of Korea, Jamaica, Colombia, Ireland, Kenya, Morocco, Samoa, Latvia, Nigeria, Malta, Niger, Ecuador, Angola, Paraguay, Malaysia, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Bangladesh, Bolivia and Kazakhstan. These were followed by one signatory state, Israel, and one non-signatory state, South Sudan. Rights of reply were exercised by Syria, State of Palestine and Russia. These were followed by statements by international bodies: the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN, delivered by Malaysia), the Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction (delivered by Japan), the UN Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1540 (2004) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. For scheduling reasons, this section also included the statement by the Chair of the OPCW Advisory Board on Education and Outreach (ABEO) on the activities of the Board. Statements were given by the International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry (IUPAC) and the International Chemical Trade Association (ICTA) before the general debate was rounded off by ten themed statements from NGOs coordinated by the CWC Coalition.

### **General debate themes**

Roughly seven and a half hours of plenary time have been spent on this agenda item. The analysis here draws on statements made on Monday and on Tuesday. With so many

statements delivered, it is impossible for any thematic analysis to be comprehensive. There is a focus here on themes that may be the subject of discussion or contention in the coming days.

*Condemnation of use of chemical weapons* – A large number of interventions included condemnation of the use of chemical weapons anywhere, by anyone and under any circumstances. This formulation was also used by Syria, a country that has been accused of using chemical weapons in recent times. A significant majority of states parties referring to these allegations indicated a belief that they were true and a considerable number of delegations called for those responsible for the use of chemical weapons to be held accountable.

*Syria and the OPCW* – There were numerous calls for Syria to cooperate with declaration and investigation processes under the Convention with many statements including references to the the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) conclusions that there were ‘reasonable grounds’ to believe government forces had used chemical weapons in Syria. There were explicit calls that Russia should cease shielding Syria. Syria argued that it had fulfilled all its obligations under the Convention and described the IIT as illegal. Russia suggested it was absurd to be described as protecting Syria.

*Other allegations of use* – The incidents in which Sergei and Yulia Skripal and Alexei Navalny were taken ill were raised a number of times with specific allegations that it was Russia that was responsible. A number of delegations recalled a set of questions posed to Russia by 45 states parties in 2020 using the provisions to seek clarifications under CWC Article IX to which there have been no substantive answers. Russia described the Skripal/Navalny allegations as ‘unsubstantiated’ and suggested it was lack of cooperation by Western countries that left the cases unresolved.

*Destruction of declared chemical weapons* – There were many statements welcoming the impending completion of destruction of the last declared chemical weapons and recognition that this would move the Convention into what some have called the ‘post-destruction phase’. There were calls for the OPCW to ensure it maintained the capacity to respond to new declarations of chemical weapons to be destroyed on accession of additional states parties.

*Staffing issues* – There were a number of expressions of support for greater flexibility under the tenure policy to aid skills retention in the Technical Secretariat. The questions of gender balance and geographical representation of staff within the Technical Secretariat were raised many times. Comments made indicate that these issues have generated much firmer positions than at previous Review Conferences.

*Capacity-building activities* – There are capacity-building issues relating to promotion of peaceful uses of chemistry, protection against threat of use of chemical weapons and for broader questions of effective implementation of the provisions of the Convention. There were many references to activities such as the twinning of laboratories that had produced tangible enhanced capacities together with calls to do more. There were expressions of thanks that briefings in preparation for the Review Conference had been held in Brussels as a number of countries have representatives to the OPCW based there. Ambassador van der Kwast thanked delegates who had travelled from Brussels to attend the Review Conference. The capacity-building potentials of the new ChemTech Centre were widely welcomed, alongside a few concerns raised that financial provisions for the Centre should not draw funds away from other capacity-building activities.

*Financial issues* – There were calls for timely payments of assessed contributions in order to underpin the stability of the OPCW and suggestions that the Programme for Africa should be funded from the regular budget in order to ensure its sustainability.

*NGO accreditation* – There were many expressions of support for non-governmental organizations and a number of calls for revising the processes by which NGOs are accredited to make them more transparent and non-discriminatory.

*This is the third report from the Fifth Review Conference for the Chemical Weapons Convention being held in The Hague from 15 to 19 May 2023. These reports are written by Richard Guthrie of CBW Events who is solely responsible for their contents. The reports are available via <http://www.cbw-events.org.uk/cwc-rep.html> which includes a subscription link to receive the reports via email. The author can be contacted via [richard@cbw-events.org.uk](mailto:richard@cbw-events.org.uk).*