

# CWC Review Conference Report

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## The second day of the Conference: the General Debate continues

The Fourth five-yearly Review Conference (RC-4) of the of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) continued on Thursday with the General Debate – the chance for delegations to set out their views through prepared statements in plenary session. The debate took the whole day of the plenary meeting.

National statements were delivered by Qatar, Peru, Morocco, Ireland, USA, Slovenia, Cuba, Japan, Indonesia, Lithuania, UK, Canada, Australia, Ecuador, Spain, Bangladesh, Guatemala, Burundi, Norway, Malaysia, Chile, Latvia, Sweden, Luxembourg, Uruguay, Bahrain, Belarus, Viet Nam, Argentina, Uganda, Malta, Italy, Philippines, Czech Republic, State of Palestine, Estonia, Turkey and Kenya.

At the lunch break, the Chair of the Review Conference, Ambassador Agustín Vásquez Gómez (El Salvador), indicated there had been requests to exercise rights of reply. The Chair indicated that these would be taken at the end of the General Debate, in line with previous practice.

### **Some General Debate themes**

With the General Debate continuing into Friday, it is difficult to come to any conclusions relating to any predominant themes. As well as there being more statements to come, there may be an element of chance as to whether delegations interested in any particular aspect happened to all speak on one particular day or another. Nonetheless, there were a number overarching themes; some of which will be examined here and some in the next daily report. The reporting here takes details from statements made on Wednesday and Thursday.

*Universality* – Universality is an issue that is regularly raised within international treaties dealing with global challenges as the breadth of the membership is a reflection of overall effectiveness. Five countries had joined the CWC since the Third Review Conference (RC-3) in 2013 and were named in many statements – Somalia, Syria, Myanmar, Angola and the State of Palestine. Non-states parties were also named – the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Egypt and South Sudan have neither signed nor acceded to the Convention; and Israel has signed the Convention but not ratified it. [*Note:* the acceptance of an instrument of signature, ratification or accession by a depositary to a treaty does not imply that the provider of that instrument is universally recognized as a state in its own right. For example, the Cook Islands and Niue are long-standing states parties to the CWC, but neither is recognized as a state by many governments.] Some statements noted that the fundamental objective of the CWC – the creation of a true chemical-weapon-free world – cannot be achieved if any country remains outside the Convention. Others suggested that should be no advantages to remaining a non-state party to the Convention.

*Article XI* – The issue of access to peaceful uses of chemistry is covered by Article XI of the Convention, embodying a bargain that the renunciation of chemical weapons and the control of poisons as weapons has to be implemented in such a way as to facilitate the use of chemistry for peaceful purposes. The NAM statement welcomed the 2016, 2017 and 2018 annual review and evaluation workshops of the components of an agreed framework for the implementation of Article XI, following on from C-16/DEC.10. Iran noted its working paper on ‘Full, Effective and Non-Discriminatory Implementation of Article XI’ [RC-4/WP.7], a major segment of which relates to controls of transfers which

that country suggests are implemented unfairly. There were a number of capacity building issues raised relating to this article and many references to the work of the OPCW's Africa programme. It was noted that capacity building could assist in promoting broader geographical representation of designated laboratories.

*Allegations of use of chemical weapons* – There are four sets of allegations of use that appeared regularly in statements: by Syria within the territory of that country; by non-state actors in the territory of Iraq and Syria; the poisoning of Kim Jong-nam at Kuala Lumpur airport; and the poisoning of Sergei Skripal in Salisbury in which others were also affected. Of these, only the Kuala Lumpur incident was uncontested in statements. Syria did not appear to give a specific denial of use in its Review Conference statement, but had done so in an intervention during the Conference of States Parties earlier in the week. Syria was explicit in claiming that 'false flag' attacks had taken place in its territory. Allegations relating to Syria were raised in a large number of statements and were at the core of most divergences of views expressed. Bangladesh, in a plea for unity, said 'these allegations, unless held accountable, will come to haunt us', and referred to exchanges on the subject as 'bullets of duality' that 'split us into a subtle line of "us" and "them"'. Many statements expressed hopes that use of chemical weapons would become a thing of the past and that there would be no more victims.

*Investigations of alleged use* – The primary arrangement for investigating alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria is the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission (FFM), established in 2014 through a decision of the Executive Council. The work of the FFM has been contested. Some statements were slightly coded, for example, the NAM statement said: 'We take note of the work done so far by [the FFM] and look forward to receiving its reports on its ongoing activities. We expect the approach followed by the FFM teams would be uniform and consistent.' Russia was more explicit and suggested the terms of reference of the FFM required 'drastic revision' in order to 'fully brought in conformity with the provisions of the CWC'. Others were overt in their support for the Mission; Ireland noted it had 'long supported and trusted' the work of the OPCW in this area, including the work of the FFM. Issues around attribution and the June decision will be discussed in the next daily report.

*Allegations of possession of chemical weapons* – A number of statements alleged continuing possession of chemical weapons by Syria and noted the work of the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT). The Republic of Korea noted 'with concern' a recent report by the DAT that the OPCW remains unable to resolve 'all of the identified gaps, inconsistencies, and discrepancies in Syria's initial declaration'. The US highlighted 'longstanding concerns' that Iran 'maintains a chemical weapons program that it failed to declare to the OPCW' and other concerns that Iran 'is pursuing Central Nervous System-Acting Chemicals for offensive purposes'. The US then made 3 more specific allegations about declarations. It is likely that these allegations are the prompt for the right of reply requests.

*Further themes* – Themes to be discussed in the next daily report include: attribution and the June decision, scientific and technological developments, chemical weapons destruction and OPCW management issues.

### **Side Events**

Usually in these reports it is useful to list side events taking place as this gives an indication of the topics gaining most attention. However, the number of side events at this Review Conference is too high to be able to list them individually. For example, on Thursday there were 2 breakfast events, 5 at lunchtime and 2 in parallel with the afternoon plenary session.

*This is the fifth 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)>>.*