

NGO Joint Statement

NGO Statement on Civil Society Participation and Transparency

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29th Conference of States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention, The Hague, The Netherlands, 25 November – 29 November 2024

Mr. Chairman, Director-General, Distinguished Delegates, Civil Society Colleagues:

The Chemical Weapons Convention recently marked its 27th year since entry-into-force in 1997. Its implementing agency, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) has made tremendous strides in fulfilling the primary goals of the Convention – disarmament, nonproliferation, and peaceful uses of chemistry. It also verified the destruction of the last chemical weapon in declared stockpiles when the United States destroyed an M-55 rocket filled with GB sarin; this marked over 72,000 metric tons abolished since 1997 in eight declared possessor states.

While annual conferences have always been welcoming to non-governmental participation since entry-into-force, civil society experts faced considerable discriminatory practices, resulting in very few – ten to fifteen – NGO representatives joining the annual CSP. It was not until 2004 that then Director-General Rogelio Pfrirter helped NGOs organize an outside session he entitled a “Peace Forum,” held in the Peace Palace. This was a great success, not the least because food and drink was served, and offered a refreshing and frank discussion of States Parties’ efforts to meet the CWC deadlines and abolish their arsenals. No stockpiles were destroyed by then, and it was obvious that no possessor state would meet the final deadline in 2007.

Several years later, DG Pfrirter organized successful Industry and Academic Forums, and annually organized a luncheon to meet with NGOs participating in the CSP. In 2009 several NGO representatives decided to organize the CWC Coalition and encourage more global participation in the annual CSP, five-year Review Conferences, and year-round.

Not until the 3rd Five-Year Review Conference in 2013 were NGOs, facilitated by the CWC Coalition, given the privilege to speak in plenary session, thanks especially to Review Conference Chairman Krzysztof Patulej of Poland. Since then, NGOs have been afforded side events, exhibits, access to CSP and RC daily documents, and much better access in general under the good leadership of DGs Ahmet Uzumcu and Fernando Arias. The CWC Coalition now has over 350 NGO representatives around the globe, including many victims’ groups, and is proud to help facilitate over 100-150 civil society representatives’ participation in annual meetings, including CSP-29. Also important is that we have been supported by many States Parties, most importantly the Canadian Department of Global Affairs, the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, amongst many others.

But we still have a long way to go to maximize public outreach and transparency, vital to a resilient and well-recognized OPCW. Let me note a few items for us all to work on in coming years to improve inclusion, transparency, public awareness, and stakeholder engagement.

- (1) TS availability for public speaking – Very few, if any, high-level officials of the Technical Secretariat are available for public speaking when invited by the CWC Coalition and others. While we recognize the need to weigh public outreach and education against the need for some secrecy on national security grounds, we emphasize the importance of making OPCW officials available from time to time, especially when asked by the CWC Coalition and other prominent NGOs, for our webinars.
- (2) TS outreach at regional training seminars – The TS undertakes over 100 regional training workshops and seminars annually for inspectors, customs officials, and others, but nowhere do we see any public engagement. We recognize that many, perhaps most, of these activities are managed by National Authorities, but we point to the important opportunity of engaging the non-governmental and media communities at the same time. Why not have a 1–2-hour press conference and/or presentation for the local academic community and NGOs? This might be called a Track 1.5 or 2.0 dialogue by political scientists. This of course plays into our first point allowing TS officials to speak publicly.
- (3) The ChemTech Center – The OPCW now has an excellent and brand new ChemTech Center for research and training. A major part of the annual program should include non-governmental expert dialogue and training. This has no doubt been discussed, but it would be useful engaging NGOs and other relevant experts between the annual conferences.
- (4) Greater transparency by the OPCW and States Parties – Chemical weapons have been banned for over thirty years now. It is no secret that all stockpiles have been destroyed and are in the process of clean-up and remediation. We would urge the original declarations of all States Parties to be made public now so that researchers and historians might be more informed of historical facts. We are happy to work with all parties involved in this process so that it proceeds in a timely manner.
- (5) Accreditation at CSPs and RCs – We are committed to a process of fair application review so that all interested stakeholders and NGOs are reviewed in a timely manner. This process with the General Committee has improved greatly over the last few years, giving approval to most previously approved NGOs in time to make travel plans and visas. However, over a dozen NGOs are still excluded from the CSP for unknown reasons, at the whim of a small number of States Parties. For example, no NGO from Syria or Israel has yet to be approved. We all must work on continuing to make this a fair and transparent process. And finally,
- (6) OPCW Public Affairs – We would like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation to the Public Affairs Office for their continuing efforts to engage the public and non-governmental communities. To use a metaphor, we all realize that we're rowing

in the same direction, but we'd like to see less headwind. We look forward to working with them in the future to expand the outreach of the OPCW.

Thank you very much and request that this document be included in the official proceedings of the 29th Conference of States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention.