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DEPARTMENT OF CHEMISTRY

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Strengthening the CWC Verification Regime

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Chairperson, Director General, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen:

The Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) imposes a comprehensive ban on chemical weapons, but also strives not to hinder legitimate chemical activities, which are vital to the development and economy of any country. For these reasons, the CWC has a rigorous verification regime intended to ensure that chemicals are only used for purposes not prohibited by the Convention. The verification regime is fundamental to all aspects of the CWC, supporting its disarmament, nonproliferation, and counterproliferation objectives.

With the elimination of all the chemical stockpiles declared by the States Parties completed in the summer of 2023, there is now an opportunity to focus on strengthening the CWC verification regime and adapting it to the 21st century landscape. Leveraging and vigorously supporting the work of the OPCW Scientific Advisory Board and of civil society experts will be fundamental to achieving these objectives.

First, it will be important to ***increase the focus on unscheduled chemicals***. Despite the general purpose criterion, the chemicals covered by the CWC Schedules have a special status that goes beyond being subject to declaration requirements more stringent than those that apply to unscheduled chemicals. Notably, they are the primary focus of OPCW inspectors and the OPCW Laboratory, and they form the basis for the proficiency tests of OPCW-designated laboratories. Frequent assessments of the currency of the CWC Schedules would be in order due to the rapid pace at which the world is evolving. However, such frequent assessments are impractical and

¹ This statement reflects the views and opinions of the author and does not necessarily represent those of the author's organization or its members.



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difficult to accomplish in the current geopolitical context. Therefore, adopting a nimble and flexible approach that can quickly pivot as the threat evolves is necessary. An enhanced focus on unscheduled chemicals of concern by the OPCW and its designated laboratories will promote such adaptability. The prompt identification of unscheduled chemicals by OPCW-designated laboratories in recent years is already an encouraging sign of their preparedness.

Second, it will be important to ***harness artificial intelligence (AI) and information technology***. By leveraging advancements in AI and information technology, the OPCW can improve the monitoring and analysis of violations of the Convention's mandates. AI and information technology will not only streamline verification processes but also enhance the capability to predict and respond to possible violations, more efficiently distinguishing them from legitimate activities. An encouraging indication of the steps already taken by the OPCW in this direction is the recent launch of the "Artificial Intelligence Research Challenge" to support the work of researchers and scientists aiming to propose AI-based solutions that can facilitate the Organisation's operations.

Finally, it will be important to ***routinize challenge inspections***, as an effective verification regime cannot solely rely on mandatory declarations by States Parties. Article IX clearly delineates challenge inspections as a counterproliferation mechanism designed to address suspected violations. However, there has been excessive reluctance to utilize this instrument, which, in fact, has never been used. The CWC's stipulation to refrain from unfounded requests should not be interpreted as implying that a challenge inspection should only be initiated if there is absolute certainty that a violation has occurred. Instead, challenge inspections should be initiated based on well-founded suspicion of violations, with the intent of resolving reasonable doubts. Ultimately, challenge inspections should come to be regarded not exclusively as a counterproliferation mechanism but also as a nonproliferation mechanism. Such a paradigm shift implies that States Parties should be prepared and willing to undergo challenge inspections themselves, as a commitment to transparency.

This analysis was supported by the CWC Coalition and will be part of an upcoming report.

Thank you for your attention. We request that this statement be included in the CSP-29 official proceedings.