

**REPORT BY H.E. AMBASSADOR ARNOLDO BRENES CASTRO OF COSTA RICA AND H.E. AMBASSADOR THOMAS SCHIEB OF GERMANY ON THE CONSULTATIONS ON ENGAGEMENT WITH CIVIL SOCIETY¹****1. INTRODUCTION: FOLLOW-UP TO THE FIFTH REVIEW CONFERENCE² AND LOOKING AHEAD**

- 1.1 “Civil society actors are important and impactful enablers in strengthening norms and policies that ensure the Convention’s credibility and relevance. A more sustained and meaningful ongoing dialogue with civil society would be beneficial for the full implementation of the Convention” (EC-103/S/4, dated 10 July 2023).
- 1.2 In view of the above, and following up on the discussions in the run-up to and during the Fifth Review Conference in May 2023, Germany and Ecuador—the latter succeeded by Costa Rica at the beginning of 2024—have been co-facilitating informal consultations on engagement with civil society. The co-facilitators were and remain convinced that exchanges with external stakeholders and their contributions to the work of the OPCW will become even more important in the future. A case in point is the topic of emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), and the ensuing challenges for the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (the Convention) respectively—an intensive exchange with the scientific community on these complex issues is of critical importance in order for the OPCW to remain fit for purpose.
- 1.3 It was stressed repeatedly during the consultations that civil society should be understood in a broad sense, meaning that civil society does not only encompass non-governmental organisations (NGOs) but also chemical industry associations and scientific research institutes, including think tanks, as well as media outlets and journalists, youth organisations, and other relevant stakeholders.
- 1.4 The informal consultations’ objectives were to: first, take stock of the past and current practice of engagement with civil society; second, to discuss options to possibly facilitate and broaden this engagement; and third, to agree on respective recommendations to this effect, including the process of accreditation of NGOs to the sessions of the Conference of States Parties (the Conference).

¹ The report is the sole responsibility and opinion of the co-facilitators of the informal consultations.

² Review Conference = Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties to Review the Operation of the Chemical Weapons Convention.



- 1.5 We very much commend States Parties for their engagement in the many rounds of constructive discussions, and for sharing their ideas and suggestions on how to make the exchange with civil society even more productive, consistent, and transparent in the future. And we would very much like to thank the Technical Secretariat (the Secretariat), in particular the Public Affairs Branch, for its invaluable support and advice.
- 1.6 In light of these discussions, we have made a few recommendations as to how engagement with civil society could be deepened (see Section 5).
- 1.7 Regarding the issue of accreditation of NGOs to the sessions of the Conference, notwithstanding all the efforts to reach a compromise solution, regrettably, a few States Parties were not able to agree to some modest recommendations to the General Committee as to making this process more consistent, efficient, and transparent.

2. PAST AND PRESENT OPCW ENGAGEMENT WITH CIVIL SOCIETY

- 2.1 The active role of civil society in supporting the Convention has a long-standing history. Currently, various formats and points of interaction with civil society actors exist within the system of the OPCW,³ such as the Scientific Advisory Board (SAB), the Advisory Board on Education and Outreach (ABEO), the OPCW-ICCA Joint Steering Committee (JSC), the Chemical Industry Coordination Group, the Advisory Panel on Future Priorities of the OPCW, the Joint Research Fellowships of the Centre for Chemistry and Technology, the OPCW-The Hague Award, as well as the position of NGO Coordinator.
- 2.2 However, many States Parties, as well as the co-facilitators, are convinced that the full potential of the interaction with civil society actors for the benefit of the OPCW is not fully utilised. With the exception of accredited NGOs participating in the sessions of the Conference, there is no form of regular structured engagement between the Secretariat, States Parties, and civil society. Also, exchange between the OPCW's policy-making organs and civil society actors during intersessional periods is very limited. There is an imbalance in terms of participation of NGOs in the sessions of the Conference—some regions are hardly represented at all.
- 2.3 The reasons for engaging with civil society are manifold. Civil society actors identify current and future challenges to the OPCW. They share their expertise and technical knowledge and offer diverse perspectives, thereby supporting States Parties in their policy-making activities. This is especially welcome with respect to the highly dynamic issue of emerging technologies, as States Parties can better grasp the impacts, possibilities, and risks of such technical developments through the input of civil society. Consequently, civil society actors contribute to the work required to effectively implement the Convention. Engaging with civil society actors increases inclusivity and transparency of international decision-making processes, and can support efforts to advance the national implementation of the Convention. Last but not least, engaging with civil society also strengthens the reputation, credibility, and acceptance of the OPCW, its mandate, and its activities.

³ See “Our Partners” on the OPCW website at <https://www.opcw.org/about/our-partners>.

- 2.4 At the Third Review Conference in 2013, States Parties underlined their “[d]esire to improve interaction with chemical industry, the scientific community, academia, and civil society organisations engaged in issues relevant to the Convention, and cooperate as appropriate with other relevant international and regional organisations, in promoting the goals of the Convention”⁴ and “[e]ncouraged the Secretariat and the States Parties to improve interaction with the chemical industry, the scientific community, academia, and civil society organisations engaged in issues relevant to the Convention, and encouraged the Secretariat and States Parties to develop a more open approach, in conformity with the Rules of Procedure of the policy-making organs with regard to such interaction.”⁵ In addition, the Third Review Conference adopted the “Guidelines for Future Attendance and Participation by Non-Governmental Organisations” with respect to the sessions of the Conference (Annex to RC-3/DEC.2, dated 8 April 2013).
- 2.5 During preparations for and during the Fifth Review Conference, States Parties discussed the challenges and opportunities facing the OPCW in its engagement with civil society. Shortly after the Fifth Review Conference, at the 103rd Session of the Executive Council (the Council), Germany suggested, in its paper “Follow-up to the Fifth Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties to Review the Operation of the Chemical Weapons Convention – Engagement with Civil Society” (EC-103/WP.2, dated 4 July 2023), starting a discussion among interested States Parties about the options on how to ensure a more structured and systematic interaction with civil society.

3. ACTIVITIES OF THE CO-FACILITATORS

- 3.1 In total, 10 rounds of informal consultations, in hybrid format, took place.⁶ States Parties from all regions were present and the attendance of delegates in person or online was significant, showing great interest in the topic. The informal consultations were held in a positive atmosphere and spirit of cooperation. They were inclusive and benefited greatly from States Parties’ diverse perspectives.
- 3.2 The consultations started with a stocktaking discussion on past experiences regarding interaction with civil society, on the basis of information provided by the Secretariat. States Parties also looked at how other international organisations interacted with civil society, again on the basis of a document prepared by the Secretariat, and discussed possibilities to follow such examples. The discussion was also informed by a research paper⁷ in which the perspective of a senior expert was presented. States Parties shared ideas about new formats of interaction and discussed possibilities to have more intersessional meetings. Some States Parties expressed their concern about the regional imbalance in terms of NGOs participating in sessions of the Conference. The last rounds of consultations focused on the process of accreditation of NGOs to the Conference.

⁴ Paragraph 9.16 of the Report of the Third Review Conference (RC-3/3*, dated 19 April 2013).

⁵ *Ibid.*, subparagraph 9.155(n).

⁶ On 28 September and 1 November 2023, and on 12 February, 6 May, 6 June, 18 July, 5 September, 2 October, 30 October, and 15 November 2024.

⁷ CWBNet, “The OPCW and Civil Society: Considerations on Relevant Themes and Issues”, working paper, available at: <https://cbwnet.org/media/pages/publications/working-paper/the-opcw-and-civil-society-considerations-on-relevant-themes-and-issues/f047a99e86-1702984096/wp-10-website-version.pdf>.

- 3.3 There was broad agreement that, especially in view of the increasing rapid developments in science and technology and the ensuing challenges for the OPCW and the implementation of the Convention, civil society stakeholders, in particular the scientific community, had invaluable contributions to make to the work of the OPCW. Since civil society actors also have an important role to play in terms of outreach, the challenge of disinformation was seen as a particularly important topic of discussion.
- 3.4 The co-facilitators briefed the Conference, at its Twenty-Eighth Session, as well as the Council on the status of the discussions.

Dialogue with civil society

- 3.5 The dialogue with civil society actors kicked off on 29 November 2023 at a side event during the Twenty-Eighth Session of the Conference, when Dr Alexander Ghionis, research fellow of the Harvard Sussex Program and CBWNet associate researcher, presented his working paper on “The OPCW and Civil Society: Considerations on Relevant Themes and Issues”.⁸ Among others, Dr Ghionis expressed the view that the participation of civil society actors in the sessions of the Conference should be made more meaningful since, at present, it was hardly possible to take their views into account in the preceding negotiations and debates of the Conference, thus making their participation—as he puts it in his paper—“symbolic rather than substantive”.
- 3.6 In February 2024, the Secretariat conducted an “OPCW Stakeholder Survey” and presented the results at the round of consultations on 6 May 2024. Responses were received from 50 civil society actors, of which 40% were located in the Western Europe and Others Group (WEOG), 36% in Asia, and 24% in Africa. No responses originated from the Eastern European Group (EEG) or from the Latin American and Caribbean Group (GRULAC). While not being representative, the survey concluded that the following thematic areas were identified as relevant by the respondents: improved communications, education, and outreach; intersessional/additional activities for engagement; expanding current modes of participation in sessions of the Conference; NGO accreditation process; issues with acquiring visas for participation in OPCW activities; financial resources; supporting capacity building for civil society organisations; improving coordination among civil society; advancing the role of civil society; and advancing the needs of victims of chemical weapons.
- 3.7 The co-facilitators also sought direct contact with civil society actors. Most recently, on 22 October 2024, they initiated an online conversation with Dr Paul Walker, the NGO Coordinator, the Coordinator of the CWC Coalition, and Vice Chair of the Board of the Arms Control Association.

3.8 As recent examples of inspiring exchanges with civil society actors on issues very relevant to the work of the OPCW, the co-facilitators would like to mention the following events:

- (a) On 15 October 2024, Dr Ralf Trapp, a senior expert and former staff member of the Secretariat, gave a lecture to States Party delegates and Secretariat staff at the OPCW Headquarters. In his lecture, Dr Trapp highlighted the technological developments in the fields of AI and digitalisation.
- (b) On 1 November 2024, at the T.M.C. Asser Instituut in The Hague, the organisation Atomic Reporters organised a workshop for media practitioners on “Trust in Science: Assisting Journalists on CBRN Issues”. The event attracted more than 20 senior journalists, scientists, and academics from all five regions of the globe. The workshop closed with a town hall event with States Parties’ delegates, identifying the need for greater cooperation and interaction between journalists, scientists, and diplomats.

Youth

3.9 As noted by Dr Ghionis in his paper, youth groups have regularly attended sessions of the Conference and young people are already involved in the work of the OPCW. For instance, on 30 November 2023, at a side event during the Twenty-Eighth Session of the Conference on “Youth and Chemical Disarmament Dialogue”, experts, including young participants, shared their expertise on involving young people in chemical disarmament.

National Authorities

3.10 At the Eleventh Annual Meeting of Representatives of the Chemical Industry and National Authorities of States Parties to the Convention held in Doha, Qatar, from 15 to 17 October 2024, the importance of close cooperation between National Authorities and industry was emphasised by many National Authorities and representatives of national industries. Among the speakers were representatives of international associations from the European Chemical Industry Council (CEFIC), the International Council of Chemical Associations (ICCA), and the International Chemical Trade Association (ICTA). In many workshops, including on chemical safety and ethical standards, risks of dual use, and the risk of AI for the Convention, speakers saw eye to eye on the fact that collaboration with industry and research institutes is instrumental to monitoring developments in the area of emerging technologies and to making sure risks such as cyberthreats are being assessed.

3.11 On 22 November 2024, the co-facilitators briefed participants at the Twenty-Sixth Annual Meeting of National Authorities in The Hague, including on the possible role of National Authorities in facilitating interaction with civil society stakeholders at the national and regional level.

4. ACCREDITATION PROCESS

- 4.1 The meetings on 6 June, 18 July, 5 September, 2 October, and 30 October 2024 focused on the issue of how to improve the process by which NGOs are accredited to attend and participate in sessions of the Conference, based on the “Guidelines for Future Attendance and Participation by Non-Governmental Organisations” (Annex to RC-3/DEC.2) adopted at the Third Review Conference, as well as on established practice. The Guidelines are very general, and much of the current procedure has derived from practice, albeit inconsistent.
- 4.2 It was explained and reiterated throughout the meetings that the purpose of the discussions was not to change the Guidelines, but rather to identify possibilities to streamline the accreditation process and make it more transparent, consistent, and efficient, while also reducing the administrative burden on States Parties and the Secretariat.
- 4.3 As a basis for the discussions, two documents were circulated: an explanatory informal note by the Secretariat on the NGO accreditation process (dated 20 February 2024), and a working paper by the co-facilitators with proposals to streamline the process (dated 15 July 2024). The working paper was the basis for the ensuing discussions and proposed three areas which had originally been identified by the co-facilitators with the potential for streamlining the accreditation procedure: (1) “Introduction of set timelines”; (2) “Modalities of communicating objections”; and (3) “Dealing with previously accredited NGOs”.
- 4.4 On 30 October 2024, the last session devoted to the issue of NGO accreditation was held. During that meeting, States Parties reached agreement on the proposal for the “Introduction of set timelines”. States Parties were close to agreeing on the proposal on “Modalities of communicating objections”; however, some States Parties requested more time to consult with their capitals. The proposal on “Dealing with previously accredited NGOs” was slightly amended during the discussion, and while there was broad support for the proposal as amended, some States Parties asked for more time to consult with their capitals.
- 4.5 Accordingly, on 1 November 2024 the working paper, amended in light of the discussions, was circulated under the silence procedure until 6 November 2024, with the second and third proposals in brackets. Two States Parties broke the silence procedure by submitting counterproposals for these two items, and as a result it was not possible to reach consensus on them.
- 4.6 With respect to the “Introduction of set timelines”, currently there are no set timelines or parameters regarding the application period or time frame in which applicant NGOs can expect a recommendation by the General Committee. This has led to decisions sometimes being delayed all the way up to just one week before a session of the Conference, making it virtually impossible for NGO participants to obtain visas or make travel arrangements in time, thus effectively blocking them from participation, even though they may have been recommended for accreditation by the General Committee. Introducing timelines would therefore improve predictability, and thus facilitate the NGOs’ preparations for attending the Conference, while also providing clearer guidance for the work of the Secretariat and the General Committee.

- 4.7 To streamline the process, and in the interest of transparency and predictability, the co-facilitators proposed to establish set time frames within which relevant actions should be undertaken by all parties involved: NGO applicants, the Secretariat, and the General Committee. During the rounds of consultations, States Parties proposed a number of adjustments, and the final proposal was agreed upon by consensus following the silence procedure. The recommended timelines are set out in the table below.

Action	Time Frame
Opening of application window (OPCW website)	Five months (about 21 weeks) prior to the Conference
Application deadline (closure of the window)	16 weeks prior to the Conference
List of applicants compiled by the Secretariat and presented to the General Committee	No less than 14 weeks prior to the Conference
Consideration of the list of applicants by States Parties	A period of no less than 6 weeks
The recommendation by the General Committee is finalised	No less than 8 weeks prior to Conference
The Secretariat informs NGOs of the outcome of applications	Within 2 days of the General Committee's recommendation

- 4.8 Regarding the “Modalities of communicating objections”, this item in turn was subdivided into modalities of communicating among States Parties and modalities of communicating vis-à-vis the NGOs. Regarding the former, the Secretariat confirmed that the way in which objections to the participation of NGOs are communicated by States Parties to the Secretariat and/or the General Committee does not follow a consistent practice. In some cases, States Parties have raised objections to certain NGOs formally through a note verbale or email addressed to the Secretariat, while others have expressed their objections indirectly through the regional Vice-Chairpersons at meetings of the General Committee. The reasons for objections were sometimes provided, and sometimes not. Similarly, although oftentimes the names of the objecting States were mentioned and reflected in the minutes, on some occasions they were not. Nonetheless, it was widely reiterated by the co-facilitators that the States Parties’ sovereign right to object to an NGO was not being questioned and that, in fact, it is an important one.
- 4.9 In the course of the consultations, differing views were expressed regarding this matter. On the one hand, several States Parties referred to the need for ensuring full transparency among States Parties when certain NGOs are excluded from participating in sessions of the Conference. Although different reasons were presented, they all started with the premise that the participation (or lack of participation) of NGOs was a matter that affected all States Parties. Therefore, as a matter of principle, all States Parties should be entitled to know both which States had raised objections, as well as the reasons. Some States Parties, on the other hand, highlighting the sovereign right to object to NGOs, considered that there should be no obligation to disclose the names of the objecting States, nor the reasons, and that there are in fact no legal grounds for such requirements.

- 4.10 The issue of the modalities for informing the rejected NGOs was also discussed. Some States Parties considered that NGOs should be entitled to full transparency, both about the identity of the objecting States Parties and the reasons for the rejection. Other States Parties considered it inconvenient to share that information with the NGOs. While some States Parties proposed the development of certain categories of requirements for NGO participation which, if not met, would serve as standard reasons that could be communicated, others considered that if an objection to the participation of an NGO is raised, it implies that its activities/interests are not relevant to the object and purpose of the Convention, which is the formulation used in the Guidelines. The Secretariat also shed some light on this topic by explaining that the current practice is that NGOs are simply informed of whether or not their application has been approved.
- 4.11 Regarding this specific topic of communicating the objections to the NGOs, and after listening to the differing points of view, the co-facilitators concluded that although transparency is always desirable, and that indeed NGOs should be entitled to know the reasons for their rejection, the issue needed to be discussed further and, for the time being, the current practice should be retained.
- 4.12 However, regarding the issue of transparency among States Parties, the co-facilitators are of the opinion that since the rejection of certain NGOs can indeed potentially affect the interests of the Organisation and of all its States Parties, there is enough merit to uphold a right of all OPCW members to be properly informed about the objecting States, as well as the reasons, as a matter of principle.
- 4.13 Therefore, the co-facilitators—in their personal capacity—believe that the following recommendations have merit to be considered as suggestions to guide the process:
- (a) **How to communicate objections among States Parties:** Regional groups should submit to the members of the General Committee, through the Secretariat, objections by note verbale, indicating the NGO or NGOs for which an objection is being raised, the States Parties making the objection or objections, and the reasons for the rejection. The minutes of the General Committee meeting should record the objections. If a State Party considers that due to security or other reasons it is not convenient to disclose the reasons, this should be stated.
- 4.14 On the issue of “Dealing with previously accredited NGOs”, according to current practice, NGOs need to apply each year, irrespective of whether they had been accredited in the past, something which generates more work for the Secretariat and States Parties. The Secretariat presents to the General Committee three lists of applying NGOs: previously accredited, new applicants, and previously rejected. While the Secretariat simply makes an initial verification of the existence of the NGOs and reviews applications for completeness, it is for the General Committee to conduct the vetting process and make the final recommendation to the Conference.
- 4.15 The current practice, in which the full accreditation procedure is required for each session, appears to be at odds with the actual decision and the Guidelines for Future Attendance and Participation by Non-Governmental Organisations. Paragraph 1.3 of the Guidelines states that the list of applications should include “those eligible NGOs that have not previously been approved for attendance at a review conference”. It adds that the list submitted by the Secretariat is “for approval by the review conference and for accreditation to its future

sessions”, inferring that once an NGO is approved by the Conference it does not need to go through the General Committee’s vetting/recommendation procedure. However, in practice, the list has always also included applications from previously approved NGOs which have been subject to the General Committee’s recommendation. The lists to be reviewed by States Parties and the General Committee are thus quite lengthy.

- 4.16 Therefore, there seemed to be merit to the idea that the vetting process could be streamlined by accepting a five-year review cycle (to coincide with each Review Conference) for already accredited NGOs, with the understanding that those NGOs would still need to apply to the Secretariat prior to each session of the Conference for attendance. Additionally, considering that over time NGOs can potentially undergo changes in the focus of their work or other characteristics, and that States Parties always retain their right to object to NGOs, it was clarified that previously accredited NGOs could also be vetted at any time within that review cycle.
- 4.17 This proposal, while easing the administrative burden on the Secretariat and States Parties, would also be in harmony with the wording of paragraphs 1.3 and 1.4 of the Guidelines. Several States Parties agreed with the proposal and expressed flexibility in considering a five-year review cycle for previously accredited NGOs, as it could be beneficial to easing the workload. Others did not agree and emphasised that States Parties must verify for each session of the Conference that the interests/activities of NGOs remain relevant to the Convention.
- 4.18 In the course of the discussions, and following the proposal by some States Parties of shorter review cycles as a possible mid-ground to achieve consensus, it was agreed to consider a shorter review cycle of three years, on the understanding that in such a case the review would not be linked to the Review Conferences but rather to regular sessions of the Conference.
- 4.19 However, given that the silence procedure was broken regarding this specific topic as well, the co-facilitators—in their personal capacity—believe that the initial recommendations could be considered as suggestions to guide the process:
- (a) The General Committee reviews only new applicant NGOs, not those previously accredited. Previously accredited NGOs still need to register to be able to attend sessions of the Conference and need to demonstrate to the Secretariat that their current interests/activities remain relevant to the Convention. A five-year review cycle (based on Review Conference sessions) would apply, and the General Committee would review the list of all accredited NGOs every five years when preparing for a Review Conference.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 In light of the foregoing, the co-facilitators share the following recommendations.
- 5.2 During the intersessional period, opportunities for a more regular dialogue with civil society stakeholders should be created. For example, a series of annual or biannual conferences or workshops could be introduced, focusing on issues particularly relevant to the work of the OPCW. In view of the Conference at the end of the year, and in order to ensure that civil society representatives are able to present their views in a timely and meaningful way, such activities should ideally be conducted in the first half of each year.

- 5.3 Side events with civil society actors organised in the margins of the Conference create an excellent opportunity for exchange. However, States Parties are encouraged to organise similar events also during the intersessional period, the advantage being that there is less time pressure and no competition from other events organised at the same time, as is often the case during sessions of the Conference. Experience shows that such activities are widely appreciated by States Parties, providing fresh ideas and opening up new perspectives.
- 5.4 The participation of civil society actors from the Global South and Eastern Europe should be facilitated also through a decentralised approach. The OPCW organises various activities in every region of the globe, including, for example, workshops on national implementation (training and legislative assistance, education, and outreach). These Secretariat activities should regularly also include an exchange with local civil society actors, especially those whose work is relevant to the Convention's implementation in the State Party or region in question. This would enable the Secretariat to tap into the expertise of such civil society actors. It would also increase the visibility of the OPCW in the regions and encourage the local civil society to engage in the work of the OPCW. Last but not least, such "local meetings" would avoid the considerable travel costs civil society actors are faced with when they have to travel to The Hague in order to interact with the OPCW during the regular Conference sessions.
- 5.5 In light of their past and ongoing interactions with civil society stakeholders, including the chemical industry, scientific associations, and academia, the Chairpersons of the SAB and ABEO should, in their briefings to States Parties, share ideas and suggestions on how to make this interaction even more meaningful. Moreover, these subsidiary bodies could share insights on best practices to engage with technical and OPCW-relevant experts and support the OPCW's outreach to relevant stakeholders, making appropriate recommendations to the Director-General.
- 5.6 States Parties are encouraged to contribute to the Trust Fund for OPCW Events. Travelling to meetings in The Hague is expensive, especially for civil society actors from regions outside Western Europe, who—as Dr Ghionis remarks in his paper—must decide whether the cost of participating matches the value of participating.
- 5.7 States Parties and the Secretariat are encouraged to support NGOs to develop capacity to enhance their contributions to the implementation of the Convention, for instance, through mentorship programmes, targeted training on communication skills, and fundraising, among others, or through peer-to-peer initiatives.
- 5.8 States Parties should consider the inclusion of youth delegates in their national delegations to the Conference, the Council, and to other relevant meetings of the OPCW.
- 5.9 The process of NGO accreditation to the sessions of the Conference can be streamlined and made more transparent, for the benefit of States Parties, the Secretariat, and the NGOs (see Section 4 above). Besides considering set timelines to guide the process from the moment NGOs apply for participation until the General Committee decides on the final list of NGOs that will be recommended to the Conference, a more transparent approach to raising objections among States Parties would be desirable. This could be done by standardising the good practice that the names of the States Parties objecting to certain NGOs and the reasons for the rejection be formally conveyed by note verbale to the Secretariat and the General Committee, and recorded in the minutes of the respective General Committee meeting. Moreover, for stricter

compliance with the Guidelines for NGO participation, and to reduce the administrative burden on States Parties and the Secretariat, a five-year review cycle (based on Review Conference sessions) should be considered. This way, the General Committee would review only new applicant NGOs, while previously accredited NGOs would still be required to register to attend sessions of the Conference and to demonstrate to the Secretariat that their current interests and activities remain relevant to the Convention. It is understood that States Parties always retain the right to object to the attendance of certain NGOs to any session of the Conference. Variations of this proposal may include shorter review cycles, for example every three years, which in this case would be connected to the regular sessions of the Conference.

- 5.10 While there does not seem to be a strong interest for a revision of the Guidelines among States Parties at the moment, this should not be excluded in the medium or long term.
- 5.11 The Secretariat is encouraged to make participation of accredited NGOs to the sessions of the Conference as meaningful as possible, for instance by improving outreach and communication on OPCW matters throughout the calendar year to prepare civil society for sessions of the Conference, by providing further opportunities for civil society to network and engage with States Parties and the Secretariat, by strengthening interactions with the CWC Coalition, and by highlighting civil society contributions. Also, civil society stakeholders should, in advance of sessions of the OPCW policy-making organs, share their contributions with States Parties. States Parties are encouraged to disseminate relevant information nationally and regionally, and to inform the Secretariat of relevant civil society actors and outreach opportunities in this regard.
- 5.12 National Authorities are encouraged to increase and strengthen their engagement with civil society. Dual-use chemicals, the risks and opportunities of AI, and the resolution of transfer discrepancies present only some topics of interest to the Convention for which the involvement of industry is further required and highly appreciated among States Parties. Upholding and deepening the conversation between National Authorities and the chemical industry is crucial for the successful implementation and the future relevance of the Convention.
- 5.13 As Dr Ghionis proposed in his paper, civil society actors might be interested in evaluating whether an “NGO Coordination Committee”, acting as a central channel of communication between the OPCW and civil society actors, could deliver additional benefits for the aims and goals of civil society over the longer term. However, this is certainly a matter for civil society to review and implement, if desired.
- 5.14 With reference to victims’ groups within civil society, it might be valuable—as Dr Ghionis suggests in his paper—to strengthen the implementation of the International Support Network for Victims of Chemical Weapons established by the Conference at its Sixteenth Session (C-16/DEC.13, dated 2 December 2011) by invigorating an international network of clinicians, scientists, academia, and other relevant civil society actors to provide a forum for the exchange of experiences and ideas about treatment and support of victims of chemical weapons, as well as identifying research needs and encouraging scientific collaboration in these research areas.