

## **MAINTAINING A WORLD FREE OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS**

**Dr Alexander Ghionis – The Harvard Sussex Program**

The Twenty-Eighth Session of the Conference of the State Parties  
to the Chemical Weapons Convention

27 November – 1 December 2023  
The Hague, The Netherlands

*Chairperson, Director-General, Excellencies, Distinguished Representatives,  
Expert Colleagues,*

It has been six months since we gathered for the Fifth Review Conference. In that time, progress has continued towards our shared goal of eliminating chemical weapons, notably with the completion of declared stockpiles, and ongoing destruction of old and abandoned chemical weapons.

As I stated at the Fifth Review Conference, true elimination requires continuous vigilance. Destruction of declared stockpiles is not enough - we must prevent their re-emergence.

This demands strategic focus and synergies across multiple fronts: robust, adaptive verification; effective and targeted capacity building and training; enhanced engagement with industry and civil society; a modern, knowledge-driven Secretariat; and renewed vigour to achieve full national implementation.

*Chairperson,*

The lack of a consensus outcome document at RC-5 does not imply a lack of common ground, of potential, or of vision. I remain optimistic that the majority of State Parties can work together to achieve progress in key areas that emerged throughout the Review Conference process.

In this statement, I will provide some brief comments on what might help us deliver a world free of chemical weapons.

The underpinning element to securing the future is through capacity-building, and the growing need to ensure relevance, effectiveness, and impact. Thematic needs-assessments, enhanced interdivisional planning and implementation of activities, and increased regional and local focus can enhance outcomes.

For example, now is the time to move beyond the blueprints of the ChemTech Centre and deliver on its promise as a central node in capacity-building efforts. Now is also the time to develop Africa Program counterparts, in particular focusing on GRULAC, and identified sub-regions.

It is through integrated capacity-building that the OPCW can improve ownership of, engagement with, and adherence to, the Convention. The OPCW must demonstrate the Convention's broader security and developmental relevance for those State Parties who otherwise have been less engaged in destruction activities or industrial verification obligations.

*Chairperson,*

The future of the OPCW is one which requires increased engagement and a deeper understanding of the world in which it operates. Any effort to retreat will signal a failure in the OPCW's mission. A modern, well-connected OPCW will foster dialogues with industry, academia, the scientific community, civil society, and a range of other actors because positive engagement and collaboration will strengthen implementation amidst a complex, decentralised threat landscape.

Non-state actors drive rapid scientific developments relevant to the Convention. The pace of scientific change is well known; what is less well known is how those changes translate into real, tangible, challenges. Clearly, the work of the Scientific Advisory Board will become even more important as the OPCW relies on experts to help it make sense of the world and how to mitigate challenges effectively. Dialogue with industry is the only way to augment the verification system in a way that is effective.

My remarks so far have an underlying motif: the role of communicating, listening, acting. They also imply people. The OPCW must have the right people working within it to meet evolving challenges. Efforts so far in reviewing the tenure policy, toward improving gender balance, diversity, and geographic representation, must be supported and progress delivered. Moving beyond divisional approaches, beyond the silos, breathes life into the people that work for this Convention.

*Chairperson,*

In closing, elimination is continuous and requires unceasing vigilance from those inside this room, and those outside of it. The Fifth Review Conference opened the door to the next stage in the life of this Convention - now we must walk through it.

Civil society stands ready to support the OPCW in enhancing implementation: progress requires all stakeholders pushing forward across interlinked fronts.

Our world changes rapidly - adaptation is within the DNA of this Convention. Half-measures and inertia will render it worthless. There is no option but to step up and meet each emerging challenge, be that inside the OPCW, or outside. Progress will follow grit. Let us move forward.

I wish you a productive Conference, and thank you for your attention.

**Statement Endorsements** (Affiliations are listed for identification purposes only):

Alastair Hay, *University of Leeds, UK*

Dr. Detlef Mannig, *Mannig Consulting*

Kathryn Millett, *Biosecure*

Mina Rozei, *CWC Coalition*

Benjamín Ruiz Loyola, *UNAM, Facultad de Química*

Rezvan K. Salehani, *Iranian Green Peace Victims of Chemical Weapons Association*

Camilo Serna, *Campaña Colombiana Contra Minas*

Deborah Klein Walker, EdD, *American Public Health Association*

Paul F. Walker, *CWC Coalition*