

## **The Role of NGOs in Advancing the CWC in the Next Quarter Century**

### **Organized by the CWC Coalition**

*Chairperson, Director-General, Distinguished Delegates, CWC Coalition Members,*

Over the last thirty years of the Chemical Weapons Convention, civil society has been a driving force in the campaign to achieve a chemical weapons free world. And this year has been a turning point in that drive. When the last M55 rocket was destroyed at Blue Grass, Kentucky, on July 7, 2023, the OPCW had completed its main goal – the safe and sound destruction of all declared chemical stockpiles. We all deserve to celebrate this ambitious goal, but there still remains much work to be done.

It is widely recognized that important multilateral treaties and organizations require active involvement by civil society to reach universality, improve national implementation, and promote capacity-building and public awareness at the national and regional levels. To ensure the effectiveness of the CWC into the next quarter-century, the CWC regime should update and reform its current system for formally engaging civil society in the meetings of the OPCW and CWC. As stated by Director-General H.E. Fernando Arias, “The civil society community of non- governmental organizations, researchers, scientists, and other relevant stakeholders are essential partners in achieving the OPCW’s mission and raising awareness about the risks posed by certain chemicals.”

According to rules of the Third Review Conference,<sup>1</sup> it is agreed that: “Representatives of non-governmental organisations may attend the plenary sessions of the Conference, and participate in the activities of review conferences, in accordance with such rules or guidelines as the Conference has approved.” The amended rules/guidelines provide exactly two eligibility criteria for attendance of non- governmental organizations: (1) the NGO has been previously approved, or has been recommended for approval by the General Committee, for attendance of a session of

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<sup>1</sup> RC3/DEC. 3, Amendment of Rule 33 of the Rules of Procedure of the Conference of the States Parties with Respect to Attendance of Non-Governmental Organizations at Meetings of Special Sessions of the Conference of the States Parties to Review the Operation of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

the Conference; and (2) the activities/interests of the NGO [are] demonstrably relevant to the object and purpose of the Convention.

We are deeply concerned that certain NGOs with activities/interests that are demonstrably relevant to the object and purpose of the Convention are still rejected by the General Committee. Several of these organizations have been routinely rejected for years. There is no transparency from the General Committee about why these organizations are rejected. The rejected organizations cover sensitive topics in their work. Nonetheless, their work is relevant to the object and purpose of the CWC, thus satisfying the eligibility criteria.

Members of the General Committee cannot reject an NGO that meets the eligibility criteria on the grounds that they disagree with the opinion of the NGO. We repeat our request that the General Committee must provide, in writing, an explanation of each decision to reject an NGO. It is important to know on what basis these organizations are being rejected, since they seemingly meet the criteria that can be controlled by the applicant NGO. We will not be able to remedy this issue if we do not know why these organizations are being rejected.

The Norwegian Ambassador stated at the last Executive Committee session: “Norway attaches great importance to the participation and involvement of civil society actors in OPCW conferences and events. They provide valuable input in terms of expertise and technical knowledge. Norway greatly appreciates the current ongoing dialogue on how cooperation with civil society can be improved.”<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, the current NGO review process for the CWC Conference of States Parties and the Review Conferences is out of step with the general practices of other international WMD treaty conferences. We recommend that the final conference outcome document includes language regarding the important role of civil society and decides in favor of a more transparent and inclusive process for facilitating civil society engagement. We look forward to working with States Parties, the Review Conference secretariat, and the Director-General on remedies to this issue so that NGOs can continue to play an important role in achieving a world free of chemical weapons in the years ahead.

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<sup>2</sup> EC-104,

We request that this statement be part of the record of the 28<sup>th</sup> Conference of States Parties.

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