

# CWC CSP-24 Report

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## The first day: the opening of the general debate

The twenty-fourth session of the Conference of States Parties (CSP) for the Chemical Weapons Convention opened on Monday morning in The Hague. The bulk of the day was taken up with the “general debate” – an opportunity for delegations to make opening statements in public session on any aspect of the Convention and its operations. After the formal CSP proceedings there was the annual presentation ceremony for the “OPCW–The Hague Award”.

The first formal task of the CSP was to elect Ambassador Krassimir Kostov (Bulgaria) as its Chair. A number of other formalities were completed, such as decisions on attendance of observers. After the decision on access by NGOs, Ireland took the floor to make an intervention on behalf of 43 states parties. The decision had reflected that some NGOs had been blocked from attending the CSP and the Irish intervention expressed concern that past decisions on access were being “undermined by certain States Parties that are blocking the accreditation of some NGOs” and that it was important for the CSP to hear a diversity of voices. Russia suggested that some NGOs hindered the work of the OPCW by introducing politics into the technical work of the Organization. Syria suggested that NGOs should not level accusations against states parties. NGO access was also raised by a number of delegations during the general debate.

After a few further formalities, OPCW Director-General Fernando Arias then gave his opening statement to the Conference. Some points from this statement are covered in the thematic discussion below. His statement, along with general debate statements (if those giving the statements request it), will be posted to the OPCW website <<<http://www.opcw.org>>>.

### **The general debate**

The general debate offers the chance for delegations to make statements to outline their positions. With the general debate continuing into Tuesday, it is difficult to come to any conclusions relating to any predominant themes. As well as there being more statements to come, there may be an element of chance as to whether delegations interested in any particular aspect happened to all speak on one particular day or another. Nonetheless, there were a number overarching themes; some of which will be examined here and some in the next daily report. There were also some notable points from individual statements. The session started with group statements from: the European Union; Azerbaijan on behalf of the CWC states parties that are members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and China; and Sudan on behalf of the Africa Group. These were followed by national statements from: Iran, Iraq, China, Slovenia, Australia, Vietnam, USA, UK, Russia, Republic of Korea, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Spain, France, Ireland, Indonesia, Botswana, State of Palestine and Guatemala.

The EU noted that its member states contributed some 40% of the OPCW regular budget as well as providing voluntary contributions. The Azerbaijan statement was its first since taking over as NAM convenor after the Baku summit in October. The USA talked of a “priority to restore deterrence against the use of chemical weapons” and suggested that Myanmar had a past chemical weapons programme that was undeclared.

*Use of chemical weapons* – many statements made references of regret that recent years had seen use of chemical weapons in Iraq, Malaysia, Syria and the UK.

France referred to a recent expert level meeting in Paris under the auspices of the “International Partnership against the Impunity for the Use of Chemical Weapons”.

*Schedule amendments* – there were many statements in favour of adopting the two proposals for amendments to the Schedules [one by Canada, the Netherlands and the USA, the other by Russia (as updated)], with some suggesting both could be decided on the same fall of the gavel. There were no overt statements against the adoption of these amendments. The tone of the contributions provided a strong indication that these proposed decisions might be adopted by consensus.

*Investigations of alleged use* – many statements welcomed the establishment of the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) following the decision of June 2018, with some noting that the publication of its first report will be a significant step. Australia noted that Syria had refused a visa for the IIT team leader. Some delegations noted that the IIT would be looking further at the events in Douma on 7 April 2018. The Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) report into Douma was the subject of significantly divergent views; for example, it was described by Russia as “a distorted image of reality” whereas France called the work of the mission “rigorous” and the UK expressed “full confidence” in the women and men in the Technical Secretariat, including the FFM. In his opening statement, the Director-General had suggested the FFM report provided “reasonable grounds” that chemical weapons had been used and that he stood by the conclusions of the report. Russia suggested that if the IIT were to be funded from voluntary contributions it would lead to investigators being hired to prepare “made-to-order” reports.

*Gender balances* – there were many more references to this than in recent years. It was notable that many of the delegations that in the past would have called for equitable geographical distribution of employees within the OPCW were this time adding balanced gender representation to this call. The Director-General had noted that females now hold half of the senior management posts in the Technical Secretariat.

*Destruction of chemical weapons* – the Director-General had noted that 97 per cent of declared stocks had now been destroyed under international supervision. This was noted by a number of delegations as a remarkable achievement. There were some calls for all remaining stocks to be destroyed at an accelerated pace. The key area of stockpile destruction yet to be completed are the remains of the USA's Cold War-era chemical weapons. Iran, for example, described any remaining chemical weapons as “a threat to international peace and security”. The ongoing destruction of World War II-era chemical weapons abandoned by Japan on the territory of China was noted.

### **The OPCW–The Hague Award**

The annual “OPCW–The Hague Award” is to honour and recognise individuals and organizations that have made “an outstanding contribution to achieving a world free of chemical weapons”. It was established, in partnership with the City of The Hague, as an enduring legacy of the OPCW being awarded the 2013 Nobel Peace Prize.

The joint recipients of the 2019 OPCW–The Hague Award are Cheng Tang (China), Robert Mikulak (USA), and the International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry (IUPAC). The recipients were presented with their awards in a ceremony with the OPCW Director-General and the Deputy Mayor of the City of The Hague.

### **Side Events**

Usually in these reports it is useful to list side events taking place as an indication of the topics gaining most attention. However, the list of side events at this CSP is too long to be able to note them individually. For example, on Monday there was 1 breakfast event, 2 at lunchtime and 1 in parallel with the afternoon plenary session. On Tuesday, there is 1 breakfast event scheduled, with 6 at lunchtime and 1 in the evening (as well as a concert).

*This is the second report from the Conference of States Parties (CSP) for the Chemical Weapons Convention being held in The Hague from 25 to 29 November 2019. These reports have been produced for all CWC Review Conferences since 2008 and CWC CSPs since 2018 and are written by Richard Guthrie of CBW Events for the CWC Coalition, a global network of non-governmental groups with an interest in the Convention. The reports, together with those from earlier meetings and an email subscription link, are available at <<<http://www.cbw-events.org.uk/cwc-rep.html>>>. The author can be contacted via <<[richard@cbw-events.org.uk](mailto:richard@cbw-events.org.uk)>>.*