CWC Coalition 5th General Meeting
OPCW HQ (Ieper Room), The Hague, Netherlands
15:00 – 18:00, 10 April 2013

Minutes

Participating:
Naomi Egel, CNS; Shahriar Khateri, Society for Chemical Weapons Victims Support (Iran); Yasemin Balci, VERTIC; Dana Perkins, UN 1540 Committee; Noël Stott, Institute for Security Studies, Onur Güven, Asser Institute (Netherlands); Gillane Allam, Egyptian Council for Foreign Affairs; Kai Ilchmann, PUC-Rio; Craig Williams, Chemical Weapons Working Group; Irene Kornelly, Colorado Citizens’ Advisory Committee; Finn Longinotto, Global Green (USA); Budhi Zuber, KN RCI Indonesia; Juan Battaleme, NPS Global Foundation; Ralf Trapp, Independent Disarmament Consultant (Germany); Imsuk Yang, The Center for Environmental Safety and Disaster Management; Vanessa Rehn, Assan Tangara, Republic of Gambia; Muhamadou Lamin Jaiteh, Government of Gambia; Timur Cherikov, NGO center for non-proliferation; Margaret Muturi, Kenyatta University (Kenya); Eucharia Kenya, Jonan Kanduranaho, Uganda National Bureau of Standards; Sadik Toprak; Nasser Burdestani, ICAN Bahrain; Rezvan Salehani, SDRVWSF; Reza Rezaei Khosravi, Muhammad Shakir, SASSI; Nick Robson, SASSI; Bahram Jamali, National Ambassador for Iran for the CWC; Ferruccio Trifiró, Accademia delle Scienze Bologna (Italy); Henry Arvidsson

Observers/presenters:

Chair: Paul Walker, Global Green USA

Minutes: Sabrina Maeder, Green Cross Switzerland; Vanessa Rehn, Global Green USA

Welcome & Introductions: Paul Walker (Global Green USA)
Paul Walker welcomed participants and opened the meeting. All participants briefly introduced themselves and their organizations in an around-the-table discussion. It is the 5th meeting and the Coalition has successfully grown. Since its first meeting in 2009 there are far more NGOs participating. This year it was a great achievement that for the first time NGOs had the chance to speak at the plenary session of the General Assembly.
Victims of Chemical Warefare
Mister Shahriar Khateri from the Organisation ‘Society for Chemical Weapons Victims Support’ in Iran had the chance to talk at the plenary session about the issues of the victims. As a representative of civil society, he pointed out their concerns and challenges. A couple of victims are present in The Hague. Mister Khateri suggests to have a ‘Survivor Corner’ at the next RevCon which would allow the Coalition members to talk with the victims personally and hear their shocking testimonies. It is also possible for the OPCW media branch to interview them and get their statements published.
Mister Khateri points out the importance that the experiences of the victims are not forgotten. Iranian Doctors, who treated the victims, summarized their experiences in a book. At the moment this book is available in Persian. To make the experiences more accessible to other doctors and a wider public, it would be helpful if the OPCW could assist with its translation in English and Kurdish. Furthermore Mister Khateri suggested an E-learning programme, supported by the OPCW, by which medical professionals from all around the world could register and increase through the stored courses their knowledge about the treatment of victims of chemical warfare.
A short question/answer session followed:
Q: Paul Walker was interested to hear how many and where most of the victims of chemical warfare live in Iran today.
A: About 1 million people were exposed to chemical weapons. Most of them were soldiers. Furthermore, a lot of civilians, mostly Kurdish, from towns along the Iranian-Iraqi border were affected. But there are also a number of people from small towns, who were not registered.
Q: Imsuk Yang asked if there is any evidence that the DNA damage sustained during exposure to mustard gas can be transferred to the offspring of the victims?
A: In some villages, those who were exposed never went on to marry. Epidemiological studies revealed that already a single-exposure can increase the risk of cancer. But there was no significant increase in rate of congenital defects in the group of children whose parents were exposed to mustard gas, than those who were not. However, this was a study conducted 6 years ago and restricted to one geographical area. For methodological rigour, the studies need to be conducted into the future and in different regions.

The OPCW background
Michael Luhan, head of the OPCW Media and Public Affairs, points out that many of the most knowledgeable people on the issues of the effect of chemical warfare are not delegates but members of NGOs. These members of NGOs, who are experts in the field of chemical weapons, can add an important value not only to the OPCW but can also provide the delegations with crucial information.

The OPCW serves as a repository of knowledge and information about chemical weapons. The importance of this knowledge was also stressed by Mister Khateri,
who indicated that at the beginning of the war in Iran a lot of victims died because there were no antidotes available but also because of the lack of relevant medical knowledge on their appropriate treatment. To face the lack of knowledge, the ideas of Mister Khateri on getting connected with the ICA division of the OPCW and on the creation of an e-learning programme are both seen as very useful and should be embraced by the Organisation. Regarding the e-learning tools - there are already existing a couple of modules, which were mainly created by Mark Albon. The ICA would like to develop more such tools and reduce seminars instead. Furthermore, to support the network of ‘Victims of Chemical Warfare’ the OPCW has created a special page on its website and will have a focussed group discussion on the issue.

Until now the OPCW was kept together as a community through the consensus that destroying all the stockpiles of chemical weapons is an absolute necessity. Once these stockpiles are destroyed the Organisation will be able to deal with the significant differences between State Parties (especially the differences about the non-proliferation agenda, about the role of the Organisation regarding counterterrorism, about chemical safety and security, etc.). To reach decisions on these subjects will not be easy. Therefore contributions from stakeholders like the CWCC are important.

Furthermore, the OPCW gathered ideas on how to engage the civil society better. Last June the Organisation had a roundtable discussion. Since then, physical access to the OPCW has been improved, the decision was made to have NGOs present in the plenary sessions and more transparency on the website was provided.

The OPCW Civil Society Brief

Daniel Feakes also addressed the situation of the OPCW and the civil society. For the civil society the access to the OPCW was historically problematic. But this largely improved after the roundtable discussion last year, as mentioned by Michael Luhan. Furthermore, there were 100 events globally last year organised by the International Cooperation and Assistance (ICA) Division. This way the OPCW ‘comes to you’ and the events are an important international outreach.

Regarding future events - On the 22nd of April 2015 is the centenary of the first use of chemical weapons. Therefore, a series of events is planned beginning at the end of this year, running through 2014 and into 2015. The thematic focus on the centenary is set particularly on the ‘human aspects’ of the use of chemical weapons.

The Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) established a temporary working group on “Education and Outreach” at the end of 2011. Under the auspices of this temporary working group, the Organisation and IUPAC designed web-based educational materials on the multiple uses of chemicals. With a contribution from the UK, the Group is working with Dutch teachers to develop educational materials for high school students at the moment.
Future Activities
In the final discussion the question was raised, if the efforts to engage civil society especially in developing countries have a chance to be successful.
A: In most regions, civil society is coming to be seen as important. The OPCW emphasizes this message. But it has limited power in actually enforcing presence of NGOs at national meetings. The Organisation can encourage this to a certain degree, but cannot push this too far.