CWC Coalition 8th General Meeting
OPCW HQ (Ooms Room), The Hague, Netherlands
09:00 – 11:00, 3 December 2015

Minutes

Participating:
Rana M. Athar Javed, Pakistan House Denmark; Sadik Toprak, Bülent Ecevit University; Irene Kornelly, Colorado Citizens’ Advisory Commission; Maria Jose Espona, ArgIQ; Gillane Allam, Egyptian Council for Foreign Affairs; Margaret Muturi, Kenyatta University; Eucharia Kenya, Embu University; Alex Kipnyargis, Embu University; Guy Valente, OPCW; Jonan Kandwanaho, Uganda National Bureau of Standards; Terrence Long, International Dialogue on Underwater Munition; Yiqun Wang, International Dialogue on Underwater Munition; Noel Stott, Institute for Security Studies; Kai IICchmann, PUC IRI; Mustafa Kibaroglu, MEF University; Caitriona McLeish, University of Sussex; Nivedita Das Kundu, United Service Institution of India; Animesh Roul, Society for the Study of Peace and Conflict; Ajey Lele, Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses; Jean Pascal Zanders, The Trench; Barthelemy Tchepnang, CAJAD; Elaheh Pooyandeh, Society for Chemical Weapons Victims Support; Patrice Palanque, International CBRNE Institute; Kaspar Haller, Green Cross Switzerland; Nathalie Gysi, Green Cross Switzerland;

Observers/presenters:
“The Latest Fact Finding Mission (FFM) Reports” by Mr. Leonard Arthur Philips and Mr. Steven Wallis, FFM Team Leaders

“Maximizing Social Media” by Keith Powell, Web Content Manager, Media and Public Affairs, OPCW

Chair: Dr. Paul Walker, Green Cross International

Minutes: Sabrina Maeder, Green Cross Switzerland

Presentations:
“The Latest Fact Finding Mission (FFM) Reports” – Part I
The meeting started with the first presentation by Mr Leonard Philips about the Fact Finding Mission in Syria. He showed a short video about the work of an inspector. There are 263 sites worldwide and over 11’000 inspections done every year. In Syria the first investigation was done in 2013 in Ghouta to find out if the chemical agent Sarin was used. In a further Fact-Finding Mission in December 2014 the inspectors looked into 9 incidents with 94 casualties likely due to the use of chlorine.
In May 2015 inspectors with different backgrounds (e.g. chemical scientists, interpreters, doctors) conducted 38 interviews among military personnel (Syrian soldiers) and medical staff. These interviews and the medical records were used to investigate an incident in August 2014 involving 35 soldiers. Various symptoms were reported such as acute non-specific irritation of the mucosa and the respiratory tract. Nevertheless, the Fact-Finding Mission couldn’t determine confidently what kind of chemical agent was used. Mainly because the inspectors weren’t able to cross the confrontation lines and visit the place of the incident but had to rely on the interviews. Further limitations were the lack of physical evidence of a chemical agent, the lack of reports produced at the time of the incident, discrepancies between the witness testimonies and some information couldn’t be given because of the ongoing conflict. The potential causes for the reported symptoms of the soldiers are a chemical payload in launched objects. But there wasn’t any evidence or description what the objects looked like. The Syrian government gave the Mission access to satellite information of the area but didn’t have any real-time imagery.

The Fact-Finding Mission looked into five more incidents. The results of these investigations should be published in another report this year.

In the question and answer session Rana Athar Javed asked how the interviewees were selected and how the interviews were verified. Answer: The selection was done from a list that was provided by the Syrian authority. The verification was done with a matrix that checked the interviews against medical and military information. The duration of the interviews was an hour on average. The maximum was four hours. The question were asked in English and translated and they were semi-structured. Gillane Allam noted that in the report the interviewed soldiers spoke about “chemical loads in launched objects”. She asked whether the interviewers asked the soldiers how the objects were launched and if they were able to identify the launching carriers. Answer: The interviewers asked about the objects. The soldiers reported that they were launched from helicopters. But nothing more could be identified since the helicopters had no particular symbols or markings on them. Jean-Pascal Zanders asked if the Syrian government wanted to have previous events investigated as well. Answer: It was decided to have them investigated but it is still open. Since there isn’t any physical sample of any chemical it is difficult to have a clear conclusion what was used. Jonan Kandwanaho asked about the security of the Fact-Finding-Mission staff. Answer: Their hotel and the area around were protected. And they travelled in safe cars.

“The Latest Fact Finding Mission (FFM) Reports” – Part II

Mr Steven Wallis started the second presentation about the Fact-Finding Mission in Syria. The Alpha Mission 1 was done in the countryside in the northern part of Syria. There were incidents reported that chlorine was allegedly used in the Idlib Governate. The Fact-Finding Mission wanted to go there but the area was out of the control of the government. Therefore they worked with NGOs and selected
interviewees. All steps were approved by the United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS). The main deployment was in May 2015 and 23 interviews were conducted. The interviewees had a lot of concerns which was one of the reasons they tried to keep the Mission out of the press. The interviews were in English with translation and lasted between 35 minutes and 8 hours. The interviewees recalled memories about the incidents in a relaxed environment. The conclusion was that the incidents likely involved the use of one or more toxic chemicals and probably containing the element chlorine as a weapon.

The Alpha Mission 2 was carried out in Marea. Once again the Fact-Finding Mission worked with NGOs to find interviewees. The interviews were done with casualties and medical staff. They also took bio samples of two casualties. Through this bio samples and interviews with the patients and medical staff, the team was able to confirm with utmost confidence that at least two people were exposed to sulphur mustard in Marea in August 2015 and were in the process of recovering from the exposure. It is additionally very likely that the effects of sulphur mustard resulted in the death of an infant.

In the short question and answer session that followed the presentation, Mustafa Kibaroglu asked who used the mustard gas. **Answer:** Mainly the Fact-Finding Mission is looking for evidence whether chemical weapons have been used or not. The reports serve as a starting point for others. In the interviews people can speak out freely who they think attacked them. But in the reports no one is blamed and named. Paul Walker asked if the interviewees have been threatened. **Answer:** This is difficult to tell. But the interviewees had a lot of concerns.

Caitriona McLeish wondered if women were interviewed and if there were women on the team of the Fact-Finding Mission. **Answer:** There was one woman on the team and a couple of women were interviewed. This had a lot of value.

Kai Ilchmann asked how certain it is that the samples taken were from persons that were at the site. **Answer:** The sample information was checked back to other sources of information like the interviews, the statements of the medical staff etc. The second question was how the protection of witnesses was guaranteed. The video material of the interviews, where you can see the face and identity of the interviewees, is safely stored in the OPCW. It will be archived with caution.

The OPCW Health and Safety Branch has conducted a pre-deployment training with Fact-Finding Mission staff about how to deal with possibly traumatised people. In general the inspectors are looking out for each other and everyone is also taking care of him/herself. After the deployment a debriefing was organised. On request the inspectors could get external help.

It is not clear yet if the FFM reports will be available. But the first three are available via Paul Walker.

**“Maximizing Social Media”**

The third presentation was given by Keith Powell about Social Media as outreach tools. Social media are important for the branding of an organisation. They allow
reaching out to people on a one-to-one level that are interested in the subject of the organisation. An organisation can keep its name in the conversation with the help of these tools. One of the important tools is Twitter. It is good to get your message out. The OPCW uses Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Flickr and YouTube among others. Two people engage with the social media at the OPCW and the 192 member states can benefit from it. The only constraint is to be careful with publishing critical messages.

The presentation was followed by a short question and answer session about the OPCW website. Rana Athar Javed noted that the clips of last year’s speakers couldn’t be found on the website. Answer: The clips and the photos shall be made available to the speakers.

Nathalie Gysi observed that the non-member states are no longer listed on the website. Since the CWC Coalition tries to help to reach full universality of the CWC, it always was very useful information to us. Answer: The public management team was told to take the list of non-member states down without reason. Mr Powell will ask about the list at the management level.

Jean Pascal Zanders reported that when he used the search engine on the OPCW website to look for documents, it never worked. But by using Google he found the documents without problems. Answer: The search engine is an ongoing challenge and the team is aware of the difficulties. To program the search engine is very time consuming since you have to link every document with key words. Therefore, it is a question of resources.

Furthermore, it was mentioned that in the registration process it is not clear how you can register more than one person from the same organisation. Also there is no different application for organisations and individuals. The application form is very basic and it would be a good idea to have different forms.

It would be helpful to have some information in other languages than English. It is true that non-English speaking persons are less served. This is due to a resource issue. It might be changed with the revision. Sometimes information is not available on the website straight away. This is because some persons send their information later and some speakers don’t want their speeches on the website.

At the end of the presentation Mr Powell pointed out that everybody can send him further questions or comments about the OPCW website.

1 Welcome & Introductions:
After the two presentations, Paul Walker welcomed everybody to the 8th Meeting of the Coalition and invited all to briefly introduce themselves.

2 Review minutes from the last meeting
The minutes of the last meeting were handed out. The members could email Paul Walker or Sabrina Maeder in case of comments and/or questions until 11th of December 2015. Afterwards the minutes count as approved and will be uploaded on the CWC Coalition website.
Jean Pascal Zanders pointed out that not all members are able to attend the Coalition meeting each year. Therefore it is important to send the minutes out faster. He also would like to have the organizations that took part in the round table in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem last year included in the minutes of 2014.

The statements given in the plenary session of all NGO representatives will be published. Please send the final version of your speech, a photo and a short bio until the end of December to Paul Walker.

3 Review past year’s activities
Paul Walker provided a review of last year’s activities of the CWC Coalition:
He pointed out that the preparation of the side events in The Hague takes a lot of time. But the program of the week came together very well. The travel bookings took a lot of time too. Some people faced problems with their visa and a couple of people got vetoed by certain States Parties again this year.
Last year the Coalition still had funds from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for travel support. Now the grant has expired. The final report was handed in to Norway but we haven’t heard back yet. Next year we will reapply to Norway and try to renew the grant. And as always we will also look for additional funding.
For this year’s meeting in The Hague at CSP20 the travel support was funded by Green Cross Switzerland and the OPCW. We are very grateful to both organizations for their ongoing support. The CWCC reception was funded by the Norwegian and German delegations, and we also are very grateful for this.

4 Future projects
We plan to have side events during the 21st CSP next year and have NGO representatives speaking at the plenary session again. We also would like to continue to invite additional people and add value to our network. Feel free to make suggestions about whom to invite to The Hague. Another way to reach out and connect with people are regional meetings like for instance the before mentioned roundtable in Israel.
Generally, please email your ideas for future activities to Paul Walker.

The meeting was adjourned at 11.15.