

**Twenty-Sixth Session of the Conference of the
States Parties (CSP-26) to the Chemical Weapons Convention
The Hague, The Netherlands
November 29 – December 3, 2021**

NGO Statement 5:
U.S. Chemical Weapons Stockpile Elimination

Statement prepared by:¹
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Chairperson, Director General, Distinguished Delegates, CWC Coalition Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The first major goal of the Chemical Weapons Convention has been the safe and irreversible elimination of all declared chemical weapons stockpiles. Eight States Parties, including Albania, India, Iraq, Libya, Russia, Syria, the United States, and another State Party, have now completed safe destruction of over 98% of these stockpiles – over 71,000 metric tons of these deadly chemical agents and millions of weapons systems and storage tanks. This has been an extraordinary step forward in nonproliferation and disarmament, preventing any of these destroyed weapons from being used. Global security has been greatly improved and the international taboo against the use of weapons of mass destruction has been strengthened.

Yet this ongoing chemical weapons destruction process has been much more complex, expensive, politically contentious, and time-consuming than any of our treaty negotiators ever predicted. These weapons were designed, produced, and stockpiled to be used on the battlefield, not to be dismantled and recycled one day. This failure to recognize the full life cycle of these weapons, along with many other weapons systems, caused many challenges to safe and timely elimination. Treaty negotiators also believed that declared stockpiles could be safely destroyed within the ten-year time limit of the Convention, with another five-year extension as an option. This fifteen-year destruction timeline, combined with several years between signature and entry-into-force, left an estimated twenty years for stockpile destruction.

The United States is now the last State Party of the eight declared possessor countries to complete its weapons destruction program, although it was the first to actually begin destroying its stockpiles in 1990, seven years before the Convention entered into force. The US deserves much praise for initiating this global effort unilaterally, having successfully destroyed 1,436 metric tons (5% of its declared stockpile) before Convention entry-into-force in 1997.

And yet 31 years later, the US is still working on stockpile destruction and predicts its completion in late 2023, about two years from now. There have been many reasons for this long

¹ Please note: the following statement is a reflection of the views and opinions of the authors and the co-signers, and does not necessarily reflect the views of all organizations and individuals within the CWC Coalition.

delay, but foremost among them is the role of civil society and local communities in the destruction process, including the selection and permitting of technical processes.

It was to give voice to these civil societies that I formed the Chemical Weapons Working Group in 1990, consisting of citizens, local governments and NGOs in the U.S., the Pacific, and the Russian Federation. This Working Group focused on public health, worker safety, and environmental protection as a priority in the disposal effort. We also supported the ratification of the Treaty by the United States Senate in 1997 and strongly advocated for its passage. The active involvement of civil society in the US dismantlement process, including Citizen Advisory Commissions, has greatly improved protection of the environment and public health, and has also prevented time-consuming lawsuits by states and governors.

Now, 31 years later, the landscape has changed dramatically. The seven other possessor States have met their commitments, although missing most deadlines, under the Convention. The United States is rapidly approaching fulfilling its obligations under the Treaty, and has reaffirmed its commitment to meet the September 2023 complete stockpile elimination deadline.

Currently, the Blue Grass Chemical Agent Pilot Plant (BGCAPP) in Kentucky has safely completed three of its five munition campaigns and is fully engaged in the fourth munitions disposal campaign. Over 180 tons of Mustard, GB and VX nerve agents – about 35% of the Blue Grass stockpile – have been safely destroyed and with each passing day we get closer to 100% destruction.

With transparency and cooperation between federal, state and local governments, regulators and citizen organizations, we here in Kentucky have brought forward a model of cooperation and focus towards a common objective – the safe and timely destruction of our complex stockpile of chemical weapons.

The other US chemical weapons stockpile at Pueblo, Colorado, also continues to make good progress. To date over 2,088 US tons of mustard agent have been safely destroyed – about 80% of the stockpile – and three Static Detonation Chambers are undergoing trial detonations now.

In closing let me underline the important and effective role of local communities, NGOs, and civil society in the US chemical weapons destruction process, thereby helping us all reach our common goal – a world free of a whole class of weapons of mass destruction.

I also want to express, on behalf of my fellow Kentuckians, our gratitude for the diligence and dedication of all Honorable Representatives to the OPCW. Delegations from this multilateral organization have visited us on several occasions and we extend a continuous invitation to do so in the future. We are in the last few years of an extraordinary three-decade effort to safely eliminate declared chemical weapons stockpiles, and I look forward to celebrating with our OPCW colleagues, including States Parties, the Technical Secretariat, and our CWC Coalition when we have successfully completed these difficult tasks.

I thank you for your contribution to a more civil and peaceful world. And I kindly ask that this statement be made part of the final CSP record.

Statement Co-Signers*:

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***Note:** endorsement by these individuals does not represent endorsement by the organization they are affiliated with.