

NGO Joint Statement
Engaging Public Health Organizations in OPCW Member States

Statement Prepared By:

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Mr. Chairman, Director-General, Distinguished Delegates, Civil Society Colleagues:

Public health systems at local, state, regional and national levels are committed to improving the health of populations using a science-based approach with a health equity and social justice lens. The public health community globally is committed to helping with the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention to assure that

- 1) all weapons, agents, and stockpiles (including those buried or dumped at sea) are eliminated in an environmentally safe manner;
- 2) there is adequate education and outreach to all populations in ways that acknowledge the local culture and context;
- 3) there is planning and training for emergency preparedness at the local, regional and country level in all countries;
- 4) there is support for comprehensive public health registries and surveillance systems (that monitor releases, injuries, and behavioral health disorders) that can be used to assess and monitor the impact of chemical releases (from buried or sea-dumped chemical weapons and industrial sites) in the future;
- 5) research is supported on the long-term physical and psychological impact of chemical weapons and

toxic chemicals as well as the best methods for their elimination as related to human and animal health;

- 6) adequate health care, mental health and other social supports are provided to those injured by the use of chemical weapons.

All of these public health activities are embodied in the essential services and core functions of all public health entities at all levels of government and in the Global Charter for the Public's Health, which was created by the World Federation of Public Health Associations in collaboration with the World Health Organization. The public health community acknowledges that environmental health, mental health services and prevention of chemical threats are a major part of public health and that the elimination of chemical weapons is an important social, political and economic determinant of health. It is especially important that priority for support for these public health activities be given to low and middle income countries.

Civil society organizations (CSOs), including public health associations and professionals, know that partnerships with all members of society, including industry and businesses, faith-based organizations, academic institutions, media, and governmental agencies, are needed to support education, outreach and other public health functions which are needed to address the risks posed by chemical weapons. All nations have a government public health authority; about two thirds have a public health civil society organization. Well-funded public health systems can assist with the full implementation of the Convention in a transparent, science-based, and community inclusive manner. Public health entities could work with Responsible Care, a program of the International Council of Chemical Associations in over 70 countries, to improve safe chemical management.

Civil society urges the OPCW (1) to work more closely with the World Health Organization and its regional organizations in order to support training and capacity for engaging public health in implementing the Convention within National Authorities and (2) to encourage State Parties to work with their National Authorities to collaborate with public health entities in their countries to implement the next phase of the Convention. We recommend that the Advisory Board on Education and Outreach and the Scientific Advisory

Board fully include the concerns and priorities of the public health community in their plans and deliberations.

I request this statement be a part of the record of the 29th Conference of States Parties of the Chemical Weapons Convention.