

**Twenty-Sixth Session of the Conference of the
States Parties (CSP-26) to the Chemical Weapons Convention
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NGO Statement 10:

Chemical Security and the Prevention of Chemical Terrorism

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***Chairperson, Director General, Distinguished Delegates, CWC Coalition Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,***

The anticipation of terrorist groups, transnational criminal organizations, and their supporters gaining access to hazardous and dual-use chemical materials remains a significant threat to international peace and security. Over the years, terrorist groups have tested new ways and means to acquire and use more dangerous weapons, including those incorporating chemical materials. In recent years, the growing chemical industry, technological advancement, and the expansion of legal and illegal commercial channels -- including on the dark web -- has further lowered the bar for terrorists to access materials and knowledge to produce these weapons in simple laboratories.

We all share a common goal of preventing the misuse or malicious use of chemical materials as weapons. We highlight the following issues for the Conference's attention: the threat is real, legal frameworks are lacking, and civil society can strengthen chemical security.

Chemical Terrorism Threat

When determining the direction that the CWC will take in the future to prevent chemical terrorism, a look at past terrorist events can provide important insights. In one study of the 517 terrorist events involving CBRN between 1990 and 2017, more than 75 percent were chemical weapons events occurring in nearly 60 countries.²

The OPCW has long recognized the chemical weapons threat, as highly toxic liquid and gaseous substances can be dispersed in bombs, rockets, missiles, artillery, mines, grenades, or in spray tanks. A lax security environment and political instability make misuse of chemical agents more likely. To this end, it is essential to properly secure precursor chemicals to prevent access to them by unauthorized users.

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.

² Markus K. Binder and Gary A. Ackerman, "Pick Your POICN: Introducing the Profiles of Incidents Involving CBRN and Non-State Actors (POICN) Database," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2019.1577541>.

Weak Legal Frameworks

For years the OPCW has worked to address various aspects of chemical terrorism. Although States Parties have made considerable progress in accounting for scheduled chemicals in production, use, and transfers, fewer than three dozen have laws or regulations that include obligations to secure such chemicals.³ Threats posed by chemical materials have been left largely unaddressed in many countries due to low awareness, limited resources, and the pressing nature of other acute economic and political issues.

This inaction and the lack of or weak regulations can create security challenges for international trade of dual-use sensitive chemical materials and take considerable financial and political tolls on states that, in turn, weaken global efforts to combat chemical terrorism. Further, robust legal frameworks for chemical security will be needed to ensure that technological advances will create new opportunities for peaceful uses while limiting abuses by terrorists and criminals.

Civil Society Role

Civil society organizations (CSOs) have already contributed to efforts assisting states in securing chemical materials. CSOs' efforts have included: raising awareness of the threats and risks posed by chemical weapons and providing technical expertise and technical training. CSOs have also served as implementing partners for projects supported by member states and international bodies, linking local knowledge into national and international chemical security activities and generating innovative policy ideas and practical tools to help states implement their CWC obligations. CSOs also contribute through education to emphasize the positive role that chemistry can play in disarmament, non-proliferation, and Science for Peace, as well as promoting peaceful uses.

Furthermore, CSOs are well placed to link national chemical security measures and national CWC implementation efforts, given the hazardous and dual-use nature of many scheduled chemicals. More importantly, chemistry plays an essential role in helping society achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The American Chemical Society has identified seven priority SDGs and five additional SDGs that are foundational to the work of the chemistry community.⁴ The chemistry enterprise has a broad reach into technology, the economy, and human health, and there are already many ways chemists are working to support global sustainable development. Chemical security is, therefore, part of the wider efforts to address SDG indicators.

Ensuring that terrorists cannot easily access the chemicals they seek is key to preventing chemical terrorism. It is our hope that the activities of CSOs clearly demonstrate how CSOs can complement and support governments and international organizations in order to strengthen global chemical security.

³ Richard T. Cupitt and Mary Vecellio, "Missing: Legal Frameworks for Chemical Security," *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, Winter 2020, pp. 103 – 121.

⁴ <https://www.acs.org/content/acs/en/sustainability/chemistry-sustainable-development-goals.html>

Thank you for your attention, and we request that this statement be made part of the official CSP published proceedings.

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