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STATEMENT BY VERTIC TO THE EIGHTEENTH CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES TO THE CHEMICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION

The Hague, the Netherlands
Thursday, 5 December 2013
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Mr Chairman, Director-General, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of VERTIC, I would like to extend our warmest congratulations to the OPCW for receiving this year's Nobel Peace Prize. The Prize is well-deserved recognition of the important work of the Organisation and its staff, and we wish you much success in the challenging years ahead.

Universality

Mr Chairman, VERTIC welcomes Syria's accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention as well as its co-operation thus far with the UN Security Council and OPCW further to decisions requiring the complete, verifiable destruction of the country's chemical weapons stockpile. With Syria's accession, there are now only six States remaining outside of the Convention. We call on Israel and Myanmar, as signatory States, to continue to refrain from acts which would defeat the object and purpose of the Convention, and to send instruments of ratification to the UN Secretary General without further delay. We also call on Angola, Egypt, North Korea and South Sudan to join the Convention and support its objective of excluding completely the possibility of the use of chemical weapons, for the sake of all mankind.

In April this year, VERTIC had the honour to co-organise joint workshops in Angola with the OPCW and the British Embassy in Luanda, with the participation of the Implementation Support Unit for the Biological Weapons Convention. These workshops had the objective of advancing Angola's accession to both the Biological and Chemical Weapons Conventions and received the full support of Angola's Foreign Minister, His Excellency Mr Georges Chikoti. We were also pleased to hear statements of support during the workshops from the ambassadors of the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States. We look forward to Angola's accession to both Conventions, and remain willing to engage in further co-operation with the OPCW and BWC Implementation Support Unit to organise future workshops for those States which have yet to join the BWC or CWC.

Accountability



Mr Chairman, apart from Syria's accession to and compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention, the United Nations has undertaken investigations of alleged use of chemical weapons in that country. The report of the first investigation of alleged use in the Ghouta area of Damascus is complete and concluded that "... chemical weapons have been used in the ongoing conflict between the parties in the Syrian Arab Republic, also against civilians, including children, on a relatively large scale".

The UN Secretary General has underlined that chemical weapons use is a violation of international law and a war crime that must be punished. Now that use has been confirmed, holding the perpetrators individually accountable at the International Criminal Court (ICC) is one measure the UN Security Council could take to ensure that the rule of law is upheld internationally. Though Syria is not a State Party to the Rome Statute, the ICC can exercise jurisdiction over the situation if there is a referral by the Security Council. We strongly believe that the Security Council should consider doing so.

National implementation

Mr Chairman, now that Syria has joined the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Government is obligated, under Article VII, paragraph 1, to prohibit natural and legal persons from undertaking activities in its territory that are also prohibited to States Parties. These prohibitions must also extend to Syrian nationals no matter where they may have committed unlawful acts involving chemical weapons. Comprehensive legislation would allow Syria to prosecute perpetrators in its national courts in a post-conflict situation where they have the capacity to process such cases. This is important because it is the policy of the International Criminal Court to only prosecute those who bear the greatest responsibility for the crimes in its statute.

Regrettably, the report of the Third Review Conference highlights that only 91 out of 190 States Parties have comprehensive legislation to implement the Chemical Weapons Convention. VERTIC calls on Syria and the other States Parties that have yet to fulfil their Article VII obligations to take immediate steps to do so. States could also consider working simultaneously on their BWC implementing legislation and fulfil the obligations of two related treaties to maximize national capacities and resources. VERTIC has provided support to a number of States to draft such legislation to date. We hereby offer our assistance to any State Party considering drafting legislation, in co-ordination with the OPCW and the BWC Implementation Support Unit, to help them carry out these difficult but necessary and worthy commitments.

Thank you Mr Chairman.