

EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Consortium

Promoting the European network of independent non-proliferation and disarmament think tanks

E-newsletter of the European Network of Independent Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Think Tanks

ENHANCING GLOBAL COOPERATION ON CHEMICAL NON-PROLIFERATION



The Director-General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), Ambassador Fernando Arias, delivered a keynote address at the European Union (EU) Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Conference organised in Brussels by the EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Consortium (12-13 November 2024). Director-General Arias highlighted OPCW's historic achievements, including the completion of destruction of all declared chemical weapons stockpiles in 2023. He noted, however, that despite reaching this milestone, the Organisation's work is far from over. Below we publish excerpts from his speech.

Since I took my duties in 2018 as Director-General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), the world, the EU, and the OPCW have experienced significant changes.

The Organisation reached a historic milestone in July 2023, verifying in the United States of America the complete destruction of all declared chemical weapons stockpiles in the world. This marked the elimination of an entire category of declared weapons of mass destruction.

In the meantime, our work continues in relation to verifying the destruction of chemical weapons abandoned by Japan in China at the end of the Second World War. In this case, more than 100,000 abandoned chemical weapons, containing chemical agents and explosives, still active in most cases, remain to be destroyed. In this regard, China and Japan, continue to make serious technical and personal efforts and to devote impressive financial resources. In terms of universality, the Chemical Weapons Convention continues to be the most widely adhered to disarmament treaty in the world, with 193 States Parties to it.

Despite our progress, the use and threat of use of chemical weapons is an ongoing international concern. Over the past decade, such use has been documented in Iraq, Malaysia, the Syria, Russia, and the United Kingdom. In particular, our work in Syria began in 2013 and is still not complete. We continue to address the Syrian chemical weapons dossier through 3 teams: the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT), the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM), and the Investigation and Identification Team (IIT). For more than 10 years now, the DAT has strived to clarify the shortcomings in Syria's initial declaration. Of the 26 issues identified by the Secretariat, only seven have been resolved, while 19 remain outstanding, some of which are of serious concern. Two of these issues relate to the possible full-scale development and production of chemical weapons. This may have occurred at two declared chemical weapons-related sites, where no activity was supposed to have taken place, according to Syria. The inspectors of the Organisation detected relevant elements at those sites and put questions to Syria which, so far, have not been answered appropriately.

For its part, the FFM is gathering information and analysing data regarding five groups of allegations covering over 15 incidents. As for the IIT, it has issued four reports to date, identifying the Syrian Armed Forces as using chemical weapons in five instances, and identifying the terrorist group ISIL in one instance. This team continues with its investigations and will issue further reports in due course.

The identification of ISIL as a perpetrator of chemical attacks in Syria also highlights the ever-present risk posed by non-State actors. The Organisation has an Open-Ended Working Group on Terrorism through which continues to play an important role in strengthening the Organisation's efforts to counter chemical terrorism.

In Ukraine, both sides of the conflict have made numerous allegations against one another of use of chemical weapons, including riot control agents. For the first time in the history of the OPCW, two Member States of the Organisation are at war and accuse each other of chemical weapons use.

Obviously, the use of any toxic chemical at war is prohibited under the Convention. The use of riot control agents, as a method of warfare, is also prohibited by the Convention.

The Secretariat of the Organisation has been providing assistance and protection support to Ukraine, upon its request. This support includes training and advice to experts, as well as procurement of protection and detection equipment.

The rapid pace of scientific and technological change presents new challenges. To maintain its technical preparedness for the future and to meet the ongoing needs of the States Parties, the Organisation must adapt to these changes.

The new Centre for Chemistry and Technology of the Organisation was inaugurated last year. The Centre is already fully operational. It has been enhancing our ability to maintain a robust verification regime, to conduct research, analysis, and training, as well as delivering capacity-building programmes to the States Parties.

After a year of exploration and evaluation for a better understanding of artificial intelligence (AI) in the context of the Organisation, the Executive Council has decided to include an agenda item on 'emerging technologies' for all its future sessions.

The Secretariat of the Organisation has adopted a proactive approach, as the cross-cutting technology of AI has an impact on several very relevant areas for us. In particular, new formulas of extremely dangerous chemicals can be created by using AI technologies. For the production of these new chemicals, at the moment, relevant financial means, special equipment and significant expertise are necessary. It entails that the production is currently an extremely difficult task to be carried out by non-State actors. However, as the power of AI is developing rapidly, every indication is that soon, and we don't know exactly when, but soon, AI-powered production will be within the reach of more people.

The OPCW's Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) has been evaluating AI's potential implications for the Convention for some time now. In June of this year, we launched a project to explore the possible benefits of AI to the Convention and the functioning of the Organisation. In July I announced my decision to establish a Temporary Working Group on AI, following the recommendations of the Scientific Advisory Board.

In October this year Morocco and the CWC co-organised the first-ever 'Global Conference on the Role of Artificial Intelligence in Advancing the Implementation of the CWC'. The conference, which was attended by over 160 participants from 46 States Parties, affirmed that AI will bring significant conceptual and practical changes to the Convention's implementation. Its outcomes will guide the efforts of the Secretariat and States Parties alike, to adapt to our new reality.

The situation I have referred to in a summary way highlights the need for the OPCW to remain vigilant and adaptable. Our work is far from complete and is ongoing. The full support from the States Parties and the international community remains essential to ensure that the CWC continues to be an effective arms control instrument. The responsibility is on us to protect the legacy that we have received with this instrument of peace and security called the OPCW.

Russia's New Nuclear Doctrine

Since its beginning, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has been accompanied by nuclear signalling aimed at deterring the West from providing military support for Kyiv. On 19 November 2024, Russia adopted a new nuclear doctrine updating two points: the adversaries against which Russia may use its nuclear weapons and the circumstances that may require the use of nuclear weapons.

Firstly, the doctrine lowers the nuclear threshold, declaring that it may use nuclear weapons in case of "aggression against the Russian Federation and (or) its allies by any non-nuclear state with the participation or support of a nuclear state is considered as their joint attack". These statements carry several implicit messages: besides targeting Ukraine, they add some NATO states openly supporting Kyiv "as long as it takes" to Russia's adversary list.

Secondly, the doctrine adds a new circumstance under which Russia may resort to a nuclear strike, that is, an "aggression against the Russian Federation and (or) the Republic of Belarus [...] with the employment of conventional weapons, which creates a critical threat to their sovereignty and (or) territorial integrity". Such a precedent already exists as a result of the Ukrainian occupation of the Kursk region of Russia, which may be regarded as "critical" by Russian officials. The intentional ambiguity in the doctrine aims to cast reasonable doubts in the minds of Ukraine and its supporters as to how far they can go in testing Russian resolve. The doctrine also considers the "receipt of reliable data on the massive launch (take-off) of air and space attack means [...] and their crossing of the state border of the Russian Federation" as a nuclear casus belli.

A key goal of the Kremlin is to resuscitate the fear of nuclear war in the West. According to the updated doctrine the Russian president may consider using nuclear weapons against Ukraine or NATO at any moment as the character of the adversary, threat and the specific circumstances of nuclear weapons use as defined in the document are very close to the current situation. The nuclear threshold has been lowered from the existential to the "critical" level. The latter is defined by the Russian president independently of what is threatened: the existence of the state or its vital interests, which might extend beyond its borders.

The West's main task is to define an appropriate strategy to preserve an effective deterrence posture. Three principal considerations can be made. First, the West should not repeat the mistakes of 2022-23 when it appeared susceptible to Russian nuclear threats. This made Moscow believe that nuclear weapons threats could be used to intimidate the countries that oppose its geopolitical goals. The West should convey the clear message that peace cannot be built on nuclear intimidation. Second, it must remain resolved and cohesive in supporting Ukraine as long as it takes. Third, while doing so, Nato countries should keep the door open to constructive negotiations with Russia and be prepared to strike a compromise that does not reward the aggressor and open the way for a stable security arrangement.

Latest Publications

The potentially revolutionary impact of emerging and disruptive technologies and strategic conventional weapons on the nuclear deterrence debate. Tom Sauer. Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Papers n.91. December 2024.

The Fall Crisis of 2022: why did Russia not use nuclear arms? Ulrich Kühn. Defense & Security Analysis, 1–21. 2025.

The Global Third Nuclear Age: Clashing Visions for a New Era in International Politics. Andrew Futter, Ludovica Castelli, Cameron Hunter, Olamide Samuel, Francesca Silvestri, Benjamin Zala. 2025.

Network Calls

The Center for Security Studies (CSS) at ETH Zurich is recruiting a Researcher to work in the field of Swiss and international security policy. The position combines research work in the think tank, as well as administrative and content-related tasks.

More info: [Here](#)

The Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF) offers students working on their masters degree the opportunity of a period of practical training. During the internship, students will work independently on an area of responsibility under the supervision of an academic.

More info: [Here](#)

EU NEWS

THE EU RENEWS ITS COMMITMENT TO ACTIVELY PROMOTE THE FULL AND EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CHEMICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION

The 29th Session of the Conference of the State Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention took place in The Hague on 25-29 November 2024. The EU Special Envoy for Disarmament and Non-proliferation, Ambassador Stephan Klement, addressed the Conference by reaffirming the EU's commitment to actively promote the full and effective implementation of the Convention, as well as its universalisation. The Ambassador recalled, among others concrete steps, how the EU helps to finance key activities of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, such as capacity building and laboratory twinings.

Read the full statement [here](#).

NETWORK NEWS

PROLIFERATION OF WEAPONS AT LAND AND SEA: VCDNP AND IAI AT LUDOVIKA UNIVERSITY

On 4 December 2024, Federica Dall'Arche, Senior Research Associate at the VCDNP, and Paola Tessari, Senior Research Fellow at the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), joined professor Erzsébet N. Rózsa and the faculty of the Ludovika University of Public Service at a public event aimed at engaging students and young scholars to raise awareness of arms control, non-proliferation, and disarmament issues. The event was organised in cooperation with the HUNREN CERS Institute of World Economics in Budapest.

More info: [Here](#)

UNIDIR-VERTIC BWC NATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION DATABASE: ALL PROFILES PUBLISHED IN ENGLISH

The United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) and the Verification Research, Training and Information Centre (VERTIC) have developed the BWC National Implementation Measures Database. In December 2024, the final country profile of all 187 states parties of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention was published in English on the UNIDIR-VERTIC BWC National Implementation Database. This database is a searchable, publicly accessible resource containing information on the national implementation measures undertaken by all States Parties to the Biological Weapons Convention.

More info: [Here](#)

BASIC'S COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE ON GENDER AND NUCLEAR WEAPONS: MEASURING THE IMPACT

Following a series of workshops with BASIC's Community of Practice on Gender and Nuclear Weapons: Measuring the Impact, BASIC published a report presenting tangible steps to evaluate the impact of gender work in the nuclear policy field. The report maps the landscape of gender and nuclear weapons, to engage with critical questions about how impact is understood within current approaches to gendering nuclear weapons policy. Key takeaways include the need to reconsider who is made responsible for gender work, and which resources are made available to ensure the success and sustainability of approaches to gendering nuclear policy.

More info: [Here](#)