

**Forum:** DISEC 1

**Issue:** The question of global eradication of chemical weapons

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### **Introduction:**

Despite international efforts to stop the proliferation of chemical weapons<sup>1</sup>, some countries continue to stockpile and research chemical weapon agents. The issue of chemical weapons has been given a lot of attention the media recently, due to the suspected chemical attacks by the Syrian government on its own population and, more recently, the Salisbury Novichok<sup>2</sup> attack in the UK, for which Russia has been blamed. Chemical weapons are classified as weapons of mass destruction (WMDs)<sup>3</sup> and their effects can include death, injury, temporary incapacitation or sensory irritation. The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)<sup>4</sup> is the implementing body of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC)<sup>5</sup>, which bans the production, development and stockpiling of chemical weapons. The signatories of this treaty are obliged to implement its prohibition and destruct any chemical weapons they retain. However, not only are there countries that refuse to sign the treaty, but some signatories have not effected the treaty's terms by continuing to possess and use chemicals weapons. Therefore, debate on this issue should focus on how the UN can genuinely achieve 'global eradication' of chemical weapons when countries are unwilling to co-operate. This debate can include biological weapons<sup>6</sup> and the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC)<sup>7</sup>. Please also note that whilst delegates are warmly invited to use humanitarian examples as a means of demonstrating their concern with the effects of chemical weapons, UN humanitarian response to affected victims is not the main focus of this discussion.

### **Definition of Key Terms:**

- 1. Chemical Weapon-** A specialised munition that uses chemicals to inflict death or injury. This extends to chemical agents that are not fully developed weapons, but can nevertheless be used to cause harm.
- 2. Novichok-**A series of nerve agents developed by the Soviet Union and Russia between 1971 and 1993.
- 3. Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs)-**Chemical, biological, nuclear and radiological weapons that are capable of extensive destruction or causing mass casualties and death.
- 4. Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)-**An intergovernmental organisation that promotes and verifies adherence to the Chemical Weapons Convention. Its purpose is to oversee global efforts to permanently eliminate chemical weapons.
- 5. Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC)-**An arms control treaty that outlaws the production, stockpiling, and use of chemical weapons and related products.
- 4. Biological Weapon-**A harmful biological agent (such as a pathogenic microorganism or a neurotoxin) used as a weapon to cause death or disease usually on a large scale

**5. Biological Weapons Conventions-** A treaty banning the development, production and stockpiling of bacteriological and toxin weapons (biological weapons).

**Major Countries and Organizations Involved:**

OPCW (see above)

Most countries have signed/ signed and ratified the CWC and BWC

Non-signatories of CWC: Egypt, North Korea, and South Sudan. Israel has signed but not ratified the CWC.

Non-signatories of BCW: Comoros, Eritrea, Israel, Kiribati, South Sudan, Tuvalu.

The following countries have signed the relevant treaties but state that they have chemical weapons production facilities: Bosnia and Herzegovina, China, France, India, Iran, Iraq, Japan, Libya, Russia, Serbia, Syria, United Kingdom, United States.

**Timeline of Events:**

1675 At Strasbourg, France and Germany agreed to no longer use poisonous bullets in warfare.

1874 Brussels Convention on the Law and Customs of War: prohibited the use of poison or poisoned weapons, arms, projectiles or material to cause unnecessary suffering.

1899 Hague Peace Conference: All parties agreed to abstain from the 'use of projectiles, the sole object of which is the diffusion of asphyxiating or deleterious gases'. Many of those parties reversed this promise at the outbreak of the World War I.

1914-18 World War I: there was large-scale chemical warfare, which made the international community aware of the damaging impact of chemical weapons and agents on soldiers and civilians.

1925 Geneva Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or Other Gases, and Bacteriological Methods of Warfare. However, the Geneva Protocol did not ban the development, production or possession of chemical weapons.

1968 Geneva Disarmament Conference: Sweden includes issues of biological and chemical weapons on the agenda of the conference.

1972 The Biological Weapons Convention was made effective.

1997 The Chemical Weapons Convention was made effective.

**Relevant UN Treaties and Events:**

- 1972 Biological Weapons Convention

- 1997 Chemical Weapons Convention
- 2013 Security Council Resolution 2118 (Elimination of Syrian Chemical Weapons)
- 2015 Implementation of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction (A/70/460)<sup>1</sup>
- 2016 Implementation of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction (A/71/450)
- 2017 Implementation of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction (A/72/409)

### **Previous Attempts to solve the Issue:**

All the conventions, treaties and conferences mentioned above aimed to solve the issue of chemical weapons. Recently, the US, UK and France launched airstrikes on Syrian chemical weapons factories in response to the Syrian government's suspected use of chemical attacks against its own population.

### **Possible Solutions:**

- Airstrikes/military intervention. Delegates could consider possible terms and conditions as to when such intervention is justified, or if it is ever justifiable. A delegate could propose a series of measures that must be taken by the intervening countries to ensure minimum civilian casualties. Nevertheless, does intervention ever improve the situation? Does military intervention not completely contradict the principles of the UN? If not, how can the UN practically enforce the destruction of chemical weapons and sanction countries that use them to cause harm?
- Sanctions – how can the UN ensure that these have the desired effect? How can delegates be sure that these will not inflict unnecessary harm the sanctioned country's population?
- Incentives – could incentives work where sanctions have not? That said, would offering incentives (e.g. financial) not subvert the principles of the UN and be seen as bribery?
- Amendments of previous treaties – e.g. make all signatories of the CWC agree to routine UN inspections of their chemical weapons stocks and the progress of their destruction. Bear in mind that this may be seen as an infringement of state sovereignty. How would such a measure be realistically implemented?
- Potentially a compulsory UN confiscation of all chemical weapons – once again, a delegation proposing this must outline how such a measure could be implemented, including financial costs/sources, exactly which organisations would carry out the confiscation, the place/mode of destruction, and how war could be avoided in the process.
- Emphasis on the risk of terrorists acquiring chemical weapons to encourage countries to eradicate their stockpiles.

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<sup>1</sup> Note that there have been General Assembly resolutions on this matter pre-2015 (see link)

- The establishment of a UN body to negotiate directly incremental and simultaneous destruction of chemical weapons between two or more countries. E.g. when two or more countries feel threatened by another country's/ other countries' chemical weapon stockpiles and will not surrender theirs until the other country or countries has/have surrendered their stockpiles.
- Consideration for the reasons why a country would continue their chemical weapons programmes. One considerable contributing factor is that they are viewed as a cheaper deterrent to nuclear/atomic weapons. Can the UN offer/propose alternative means of self-defence without promoting war?

\*Delegates must note that the solutions proposed in their resolutions should be an accurate reflection of the foreign policy of the member state they are representing. Also note that the most effective resolutions should have a clear guiding principle, and consider several possible means of progressing towards 'global eradication' of chemical weapons with reasonable and detailed suggestions about the implementation of the proposals made.

### **Bibliography:**

<https://www.opcw.org>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Novichok\\_agent](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Novichok_agent)

<https://www.un.org/disarmament/wmd/chemical/> (includes recent resolutions)

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<https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/cwcsig>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chemical\\_Weapons\\_Convention](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chemical_Weapons_Convention)

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