

Statement by the Federal Foreign Office on the Fourth Chemical Weapons Review Conference

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Welcome

Breadcrumbs

1. [Federal Foreign Office](#) ›
2. [News](#) ›
3. [Newsroom](#) ›
4. **Statement by the Federal Foreign Office on the Fourth Chemical Weapons Review Conference**

30.11.2018 - Press release 

A Federal Foreign Office Spokesperson issued the following statement today (30 November) on the Fourth Chemical Weapons Convention Review Conference, which ended today:

We regret that following two weeks of intensive negotiations in The Hague it did not prove possible to reach consensus on urgently needed steps to strengthen the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

Chemical weapons have been used repeatedly in Syria since 2013, brutally killing hundreds of people, including many children, and injuring thousands more. “Islamic State” has used chemical weapons in Iraq, and there were attacks involving extremely dangerous nerve gas in public spaces in Malaysia in 2017 and in the UK in 2018.

In view of these severe violations of the CWC, Germany is working with many partners to reinforce the absolute ban on the use of chemical weapons, to restore the credibility of the CWC and to enable the OPCW to respond to these challenges.

Despite opposition from Syria and Russia in particular, it was possible to adopt a budget for the OPCW that will enable it to establish structures to identify those responsible for the chemical weapons attacks in Syria. However, we are disappointed that a few States Parties were not willing to identify violations of the CWC clearly and unambiguously and to support the necessary measures for further strengthening the CWC and OPCW. Germany and more than 50 other States Parties thus recorded their common position in a joint declaration: “We reiterate our strong commitment to work together for a world free of chemical weapons. We emphasise that any use of chemical weapons anywhere, at any time, by anyone, under any circumstances is unacceptable. We express the strong conviction that those responsible for the use of chemical weapons should be held accountable.

Background information

The Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), which entered into force on 29 April 1997, prohibits the use of chemical weapons, as well as their development, production, stockpiling and transfer. With 193 members, it applies almost universally. The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), which is based in The Hague, is responsible for implementing the CWC. Since the Convention entered into force, the OPCW has been able to confirm the destruction of over 96 percent of declared chemical weapons stockpiles worldwide.

The CWC’s two decision-making organisations convened from 19 to 30 November. The main task of the Conference of States Parties (19–20 November) was to adopt the OPCW’s budget for 2019. The States Parties adopted the draft budget by the Director-General of the OPCW with a large majority (99 to 27 votes). The budget also includes funding for implementing the decision made at the Special Session of the Conference of the States

Parties in June 2018, at which Germany and many other States Parties were successful in their aim of having the OPCW tasked with identifying those responsible for the chemical weapons attacks in Syria. The OPCW will now deploy an attribution team to investigate information about those responsible in the cases previously identified by the Organisation's fact-finding mission.

The States Parties meet every five years to review the implementation of the CWC and to discuss its future and that of the OPCW. The Fourth Review Conference (21–30 November) met against the background of repeated use of chemical weapons in Syria since 2013, the use of chemical weapons in Iraq between 2015 and 2017, and attacks involving nerve gas at Kuala Lumpur International Airport in 2017 and in the streets of Salisbury in April 2018.

[Overview "Newsroom"](#)

Keywords

[Biological and chemical weapons](#) →

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