Chairperson, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Colleagues,

The upcoming Fifth Review Conference is an important opportunity to consider how to broaden and strengthen implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

It is, therefore, my pleasure today to speak to this Working Group on matters of organisational governance.

I will start with a comment on universality. With 193 State Parties, the Convention commands significant global coverage. However, it is of great concern that the remaining States Not Party to this Convention are also those that some suggest have existing chemical weapon stockpiles. These are challenging cases. The OPCW must remain resolute in its efforts to engage at the highest levels with these states. The engagement process is an important signal – even if the OPCW is met by resistance, it is incumbent upon State Parties to reach out in an open, transparent, and systematic way.

This remains a difficult task and is, perhaps, dispiriting at times.

However, we should be inspired by what this Convention has achieved, be guided by our belief in its norms and principles, and be determined to achieve its object and purpose.

There remain different avenues to engage with these states, including through civil society. Yet, I believe that constructive, high-level engagement through the Secretariat, joint demarches by State Parties, and regional activities, are particularly valuable.

I hope that this Working Group can inspire the Review Conference to give efforts toward universality some renewed impetus. This may be a good time to revisit and refresh the universality action plan. I hope the issue would be able to command consensus, and a statement or declaration by State Parties would help to build the pathway to universality over the next five years.

Chairperson,

I will now turn to providing some comments on organisational form and governance.

The Convention does not provide a blueprint for organisational structure. However, it is clear from Article 8 paragraph 37 that the Secretariat shall be functionally responsible for the verification measures entrusted to it by the Convention and other tasks delegated by the policy-making organs. Indeed, as we have seen in recent years, the policy-making organs do delegate new tasks to the Secretariat.

Paragraph 44 of the same Article (that is, Article 8) suggests that organisational form may follow organisational function. I quote:
The paramount consideration in the employment of the staff and in the determination of the conditions of service shall be the necessity of securing the highest standards of efficiency, competence, and integrity.

Therefore, the Technical Secretariat’s structure and the skills and knowledge it employs and retains, can evolve to support the requirements placed upon it by States Parties.

So why is this relevant?

In essence, it tells us that the Secretariat is not fixed or static. It can be changed.

The Secretariat is both a product of Convention requirements (i.e. destruction and verification) and the designs of State Parties. Tenure, for example, is not something that is specified in the Convention. It is the result of decisions taken in the policy-making organs. Nowhere in the Convention does it stipulate a seven-year tenure period.

This means that if, and when, State Parties feel that the object and purpose of the Convention would be better achieved by a Secretariat that has for example, a new divisional structure, or a different tenure policy, or that it requires new skills and posts to fulfil new mechanisms, State Parties can work together to bring about such changes.

Of course, making such changes are not easy or rapid. However, it has been clear that some organisational aspects may benefit from being reviewed and, if required, changes being made.

Chairperson,

I will now put forward three areas which might benefit from increased scrutiny by State Parties.

The first is tenure policy. State Parties may wish to continue to reflect, with the support of the Secretariat, on whether the current formulation is appropriate. There have been a number of decisions taken to re-hire staff, and questions as to whether this is sustainable or healthy for the organisation have been raised.

The OPCW may wish to reflect on whether a more nuanced tenure policy may enable the Secretariat to enhance its knowledge management, enabling greater business continuity, problem-solving, and resilience.

Second is in regard to supporting the OPCW to become as transparent as possible. While confidentiality and security are high priorities, there still remains an information gap. As part of this, giving the Secretariat greater scope to communicate its work to different audiences is important. This can have a broad effect, not only in combatting disinformation, but also by strengthening efforts toward national implementation, Convention literacy, capacity building, and developing stakeholder networks.

Third, increasing the institutional space for stakeholders to support the OPCW as it evolves its major functions is crucial.

Civil society stakeholders are key enablers in strengthening norms and policies that ensure the Convention’s health and relevance. State Parties and the Technical Secretariat may find significant benefit in facilitating a strengthened relationship between civil society and the OPCW. Furthermore, working more closely with NGOs on particular issues, such as national implementation, can help distribute costs and maintain an efficient, effective and responsive organisation.
Chairperson,

It is encouraging that we have been invited to engage with State Parties in this important Working Group. It is one small example of how civil society can, I hope, constructively engage on a range of topics in support of the OPCW.

I will close my statement by reiterating that we stand ready to engage further with the OPCW. Indeed, I believe that the organisation of seminar series and workshops, of joint publications, of expert consultations, and of the establishment of a library on the Catalyst Portal to allow civil society to submit papers and reports to the OPCW, are all potentially beneficial and straightforward options to facilitate strengthening the relationship.

These allow the OPCW to engage with, and benefit from, outside expertise as required. Providing space to build relationships and work together is a sure way for all of us to strengthen the chemical weapons prohibition regime.

I would like to wish the Working Group a productive session, and a successful Review Conference.

Thank you.