

## Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)

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**Year of Establishment:** 1997

**CTITF Working Group Membership:**

- Preventing and Responding to WMD Terrorist Attacks (co-chair)

The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) is an autonomous international organization established to implement the *Chemical Weapons Convention* (CWC). The convention aims to eliminate an entire category of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) by prohibiting the development, production, acquisition, stockpiling, retention, transfer, or use of chemical weapons by states

parties. Pursuant to the convention, states are obligated to take the necessary steps to enforce the prohibition of these actions in respect of persons (natural or legal) within their jurisdiction.

The OPCW's main policymaking organ, the Conference of the States Parties, consists of all 188 members of the OPCW and is led by an executive council made up of forty-one states elected for a period of two years. The Executive Council of the OPCW established an open-ended working group in December 2001 and a technical secretariat to support its operation as a platform for the exchange of information and expertise among states. By promoting awareness of chemical-security best practices and fostering cooperation among relevant professionals and national representatives, the OPCW is engaged in lessening the threat posed by chemical weapons.

The organization is supported by a staff of approximately 500 people, headed by a director-general who is appointed by the Conference of the States Parties. The OPCW provides a forum for consultation and cooperation for the states parties. Among its other functions, it also:

- provides technical assistance, upon request, on implementing the CWC;
- conducts technical-assistance visits involving direct on-site help in setting up national authorities and drafting legislative and administrative measures;
- promotes awareness about the requirements of the CWC and trains relevant national authorities;
- maintains a degree of readiness to provide assistance in the case of any use or threat of use of chemical weapons.

The Relationship Agreement signed in 2000 between the United Nations and the OPCW formalizes a close association between the two bodies while at the same time recognizing the independent status of the latter. The UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and OPCW Director-General Mr. Ahmet Üzümcü have agreed to strengthen the existing cooperation between their two organizations in order to promote the international community's goals in the field of international peace and security.<sup>152</sup>

The OPCW contributes to multilateral counterterrorism initiatives through its efforts to promote universal adherence to the CWC and eliminate the threat posed by chemical weapons. Although the OPCW and its verification regime were not designed specifically to fight terrorism or detect the small-scale production, transfer, or use of toxic materials by nonstate actors like terrorist groups, the CWC regime offers states useful tools with which they can address the threat. Among these tools are the OPCW's technical assistance program and its facilitation of information exchange and international cooperation in the areas of prevention, mitigation, and response, and safety and security at chemical plants. Moreover, in recent years, the OPCW has increased assistance to states and activities that support national capacity building, particularly to prevent the misuse of the release of toxic chemicals.

One example of the OPCW's activities to support the development of states' capacities to prevent terrorists' access to toxic chemicals was a table-top exercise undertaken in 2010. This produced a model environment for preventing and responding to a toxic release of chemicals resulting from a malicious act. As a follow up to this exercise, the OPCW will also produce a manual which can be used as a basis for similar exercises in other regions.<sup>153</sup>

To test the OPCW's readiness to deliver requested assistance to a state, the organization also regularly arranges field exercises with the participation of teams and units from various member states. One such initiative, ASSISTEX 3, was conducted in Tunis to test the procedures in place to respond to a request for assistance under Article X of the convention and the organization's readiness and ability to mount a rapid response.<sup>154</sup>

As the leading international organization devoted to preventing the misuse of toxic chemicals with close ties to the chemical industry, the OPCW also serves as a forum for dialogue on chemical security between governments and the private sector. The OPCW has further developed its role as a platform for raising awareness, disseminating best practices, and promoting the exchange of ideas and expertise in order to support the safe and secure production, transportation, and storage of chemicals.

However, experts have noted that the world for which the CWC was developed has changed, with nonstate actors supplanting superpower arsenals as a source of WMD threats, and have therefore challenged the relevance of the CWC as it stands. To address this dilemma, Sergey Batsanov, an expert on the convention, argued in 2006 that governments need to take a more comprehensive approach to addressing threats posed by WMDs.

Just in the area of nonproliferation, efforts to prevent the terrorist use of WMD cannot be effective if governments continue to maintain intellectual and policy firewalls between the various classes of WMD.<sup>155</sup>

The OPCW's expertise in chemical weapons was recognized as making an important contribution to counterterrorism in 2005 when it became a member of the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force. As a member of the CTITF, the OPCW has played a role in the elaboration, development, and now implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, which encourages "the International Atomic Energy Agency and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to continue their efforts, within their respective mandates, in helping States to build capacity to prevent terrorists from accessing nuclear, chemical or radiological materials, to ensure security at related facilities and to respond effectively in the event of an attack using such materials."<sup>156</sup>

As the co-chair of the CTITF Working Group on Preventing and Responding to WMD Terrorist Attacks, (alongside the International Atomic Energy Agency),<sup>157</sup> OPCW led efforts to evaluate current institutional capacities to respond to a biological or chemical terrorist attack for the first time at an international level, which resulted in the second report of the Working Group titled, "Interagency Coordination in the Event of a Terrorist Attack Using Chemical or Biological Weapons and Materials." The report identifies existing mechanisms for responding to such an attack and provides ten recommendations to provide a more coordinated response to a terrorist attack using these materials. The first report of the Working Group, released in August 2010, led by the IAEA, explored inter-agency coordination in responding to a nuclear or radiological terrorist attacks.