

CWC Conference Meets, Extends Deadline for Russia

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Russia received an extension of a Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) deadline to destroy 1 percent of its Category 1 chemical weapons by April 29 from the fifth Conference of States Parties, held May 15 to 19. The decision effectively merges the missed deadline with the convention's next deadline—the destruction of 20 percent of Category 1 (the highest "risk" category) chemical weapons by April 29, 2002. The CWC allows states-parties until April 29, 2007, to destroy all their chemical weapons, a goal a recent General Accounting Office (GAO) report says the United States will have trouble meeting.

Although Russia missed the first deadline, in his opening statement to the conference, José Bustani, director-general of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, the CWC's implementing body, commented favorably on Russian chemical demilitarization efforts. "Russia is no longer outside the destruction activities envisaged by the convention. It has submitted to the secretariat plans for the destruction of Category 2 and 3 chemical weapons—i.e., of powder and burster charges for chemical munitions," he said. Bustani also noted that if these items were destroyed as planned, the Russian chemical weapons (CW) stockpile would be "effectively taken off alert" within the next two years.

Bustani further said that all the declared CW possessor states-parties—India, Russia, South Korea, and the United States—had "started to destroy their chemical weapons" and that "15 percent of munitions and containers" declared by the four states-parties had been destroyed. Bustani also noted that "one-half of the world's declared chemical weapons production capacity has effectively ceased to exist."

Although Bustani reported that the United States had destroyed 17 percent of its chemical weapons and had "set an impressive example in this regard," a May GAO report said the United States may not meet the CWC's 2007 deadline, which can be extended by up to five years. The report noted that the United States could destroy 90 percent of its CW stockpile by 2007 but that two U.S. CW destruction sites will not meet the deadline because of the time needed to implement alternative destruction technologies to incineration, a method rejected for the sites.

In addition, the United States may not be able to dispose of some of its non-stockpile, which includes items such as recovered and miscellaneous CW material, by 2007 due to delays in implementing destruction technologies and possible delays in demolishing a former CW production facility.

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