Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Recommendation 1571 (2002)[1]

Reducing environmental risks by destroying chemical weapons

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The stocks of chemical weapons and munitions built up over the twentieth century pose a serious threat to humanity. The deliberate or accidental release of toxic combat substances into the biosphere would have tragic consequences both for human life and health and for the environment.

2. In this connection, the Parliamentary Assembly underlines the threat posed by stockpiles of old chemical weapons and by unexploded munitions abandoned in all war zones, particularly first world war battlefields.

3. It is concerned about possible damage to the marine environment and to the food chain resulting from chemical weapons being dumped at sea, especially those dumped in the North Sea and the Baltic at or after the end of the second world war. The states which perpetrate such dumpings, especially in the highly sensitive Baltic Sea, are reminded of their moral and financial responsibility.

4. The proliferation among states and non-state entities of chemical weapons and toxic substances and the technologies with which they are produced would seriously undermine the efforts to bring about disarmament, peace and security at global level.

5. The Assembly believes that the total destruction of chemical weapons and toxic combat substances is the only reliable means of preventing potentially fatal disasters for humankind and nature. Although aware of the fact that chemical disarmament requires significant financial investment, it nevertheless believes that the price to be paid in the event of a disaster involving such substances would be much higher.

6. The Chemical Weapons Convention, which was signed in 1993 and entered into force in 1997, is an essential part of the international community's efforts to bring about chemical disarmament and is a major contribution to international peace and security. The Assembly accordingly welcomes the fact that all the Council of Europe member states, with the exception of Andorra, are parties to the convention.

7. It is, however, concerned by the fact that certain states that have research and development capabilities in the chemical field are not yet parties to the convention.

8. It also notes with regret that implementation of the convention is progressing only slowly, in particular in the Russian Federation because of a lack of the financial resources needed to destroy chemical weapons stockpiles.

9. The Assembly believes that it is necessary to increase the resources available to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) for supervising compliance with the provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention and setting up effective assistance machinery, in particular in the face of the threat of terrorist attacks involving chemical weapons.

10. The Assembly takes note of and supports the recently adopted Western European Union Recommendation 701 on the new challenges of chemical and biological weapons control.

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1. Assembly debate on 28 June 2002 (24th Sitting) (see Doc. 9472, report of the Committee on the Environment and Agriculture, rapporteur: Ms Fehr). Text adopted by the Assembly on 28 June 2002 (24th Sitting).

11. The Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers:

ask Andorra, a member state; the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, an applicant state; and Israel, a state whose parliament holds Observer status with the Assembly, to sign and/or ratify the Chemical Weapons Convention;

ask Council of Europe member states that still hold chemical weapons stocks to destroy them in accordance with the provisions and timescales provided for in the Chemical Weapons Convention, and call upon other countries to do the same;

urge Council of Europe member states to intensify, within the appropriate fora, their political efforts aimed at the destruction of chemical weapons stockpiles in general and to increase and render more effective – by establishing appropriate control mechanisms – their joint financial and technical assistance to the Russian Federation's chemical weapons destruction programme;

encourage exchanges of information, for example on the exact locations of such stockpiles, and co-operation among Council of Europe member states in connection with the disposal of old and abandoned chemical weapons with a view to taking measures to prevent any environmental damage;

encourage the setting up of assistance machinery among Council of Europe member states in connection with chemical weapons control issues and the threat that the use of toxic chemical substances in terrorist attacks presents;

encourage Council of Europe member states sitting on international committees and groups responsible for monitoring and strengthening the Chemical Weapons Convention to propose joint actions in this field and, as far as possible, in co-operation with other countries, particularly the United States and Canada, Observer states to the Council of Europe;

keep the Assembly regularly informed of any information received with regard to chemical weapons control;

include in its work programme, in particular in the work programme of the EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement, the monitoring of issues relating to the environmental consequences of stockpiling chemical weapons with a view to identifying the risks involved and the measures needed to protect civilian populations more effectively against them;

encourage Council of Europe member states to support public information campaigns especially in the countries most affected;

urge Council of Europe member states to make every effort to clean up their own contaminated sites, in particular the soil and water resources and especially drinking water supplies.