

## General Studies-2; Topic: Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate.

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

#### 1) Introduction

- India voted against draft decision on chemical weapons use at OPCW meet, citing "incomplete consultations".
- The conference was called by the UK, the US and the West to have discussions on upholding the global ban against the use of chemical weapons.
- While there was unity on the goal, there are strong differences on how to achieve this goal.
- India emphasised the importance of consensus and the need for all decisions to be taken by the members of OPCW in consultation with each other.

#### 2) OPCW Special Conference

- The conference was held in the backdrop of the widespread concern over reports of use of chemical weapons in Malaysia, the UK, Northern Ireland, Syria and Iraq.
- India joined Russia, China and South Africa in voting against the UK and US-backed decision that authorises OPCW to identify perpetrators of chemical weapons attack, stating that adequate concerns were not taken on board.
- India claimed that the decision violates the Chemical Weapons Convention's finely crafted balance and instead gives unchecked powers to the OPCW DG.
- The unchecked powers to the head of the group could be used for "partisan" purposes.
- But the proposal was passed by 82 votes in favour with 24 against.
- The OPCW now has the power, not just to identify the use of chemical weapons, but also to point the finger at the organisation, the state that they think is responsible.

#### 3) Background

- During the 20th century, chemical weapons were used on and off the battlefield with horrific consequence.
- During the First World War, more than 90,000 soldiers suffered painful deaths following the use of chlorine, mustard and other chemical agents.
- Chemical weapons (CW) were also used with devastating consequences in Morocco, Yemen, China and Abyssinia (now Ethiopia).
- The aftermath of their deployment in the 1980s Iran-Iraq War continues to be felt even today, with 30,000 Iranians still suffering from the effects of the agents used in the conflict.
- The repeated use of chemical weapons represents a grave threat to the Chemical Weapons Convention and the rules-based international order.

#### 4) India's Position on Chemical Weapons

- India is against the use of chemical weapons under any circumstances.
- The use of chemical weapons is in complete disregard of humanity and contrary to the provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention as well as international legal norms.
- It believes those who indulge in such "abhorrent acts" must be held accountable.
- India remains open for discussions with States Parties to find ways and means to strengthen the Chemical Weapons Convention and its effective implementation.

- All investigations of the alleged use of chemical weapons should be conducted in an impartial and objective manner.

### 5) **Way Forward**

- The international community has high expectations of the Chemical Weapons Convention and all States Parties must rise up to this expectation by preserving and protecting the Convention.
- Any long-lasting and effective solution to the challenges faced by the OPCW can only be found through wide ranging consultations among States Parties.
- The need of the hour is constructive engagement, dialogue, and unity among the member countries.

### 6) **Facts for Prelims**

- The OPCW is an independent, autonomous international organisation with a working relationship with the United Nations.
- OPCW is the implementing body for the Chemical Weapons Convention, which entered into force on 29 April 1997.
- The OPCW, with its 193 member states, has its seat in The Hague, Netherlands
- Israel — signed but not ratified the Convention.
- Egypt, North Korea and South Sudan — neither signed nor acceded.
- OPCW was awarded the 2013 Nobel Peace Prize.

### 7) **Functions of OPCW**

- It oversees the global endeavour for the permanent and verifiable elimination of chemical weapons. OPCW oversaw destruction of CW stocks in Iraq, Libya, and recently in Syria.
- Providing assistance and protection to States Parties against chemical threats.
- Fostering international cooperation to strengthen implementation of the Convention and promote the peaceful use of chemistry
- Promoting the Universality of the Convention and the Benefits of becoming a Member State.
- OPCW inspectors conduct on site chemical weapons investigations like in Syria chemical attack.