

# CHEMICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION BULLETIN

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## OVER THE IMPASSE

The dispute with the White House in which the Chairman of the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee blocked action on the Chemical Weapons Convention and other Executive Branch requests for most of this year has been resolved.

On the floor of the Senate early this month the Foreign Relations Committee Chairman, Senator Jesse Helms, announced that the Committee will resume hearings on the Convention in February and that the Convention will be moved out of committee no later than the end of April. As part of the agreement, the Senate Majority Leader, Senator Robert Dole, who controls floor scheduling, pledged to place the Convention before the full Senate within a "reasonable time period" after it leaves the Committee. This means that the Senate could vote on the Convention in May.

Present indications are that when finally put to a vote the CWC will receive the support of substantially more than the required two-thirds of the Senate. It is the intention of the White House to deposit the US instrument of ratification soon thereafter.

As of this writing, 45 states have deposited their instruments of ratification of the CWC. Even before the Senate deadlock was broken, the trigger point of 65 that starts the 180-day period before the CWC enters into force appeared likely to be reached sometime in the first half of 1996. Now that is even more certain [see box on page 3].

What messages do these developments carry for supporters of the Convention?

First, signatory states that have not yet ratified should do so soon. The greater the political momentum behind the Convention and the more it shows evidence of approaching universality, the more favourably will it be regarded in the deliberations of the US Senate early next year. The same reasoning applies to the way the Convention will be regarded in the Russian Federation, where the State Duma is also expected to be considering the treaty early in 1996.

Second, prospective original States Parties to the Convention must within the coming months complete and enact their domestic implementing legislation, establish their National Authorities and collect data for their declarations. Otherwise, owing to the time-consuming nature of these tasks, they risk being unable to comply with the Convention's requirement for submission of declarations within the first 30 days after entry into force.

Third, the Preparatory Commission needs to reach final decisions soon regarding management and technical matters that require decision well before entry into force. Such long lead-time matters include approval of the design and funding of the Information Management System which must be up and running before declarations containing confidential information can be processed by the Technical Secretariat; agreement on declaration-related and industry-related issues to allow States Parties sufficient time to prepare their declarations and facility agreements; and agreement on conditions of service for OPCW personnel so that recruitment of inspectors and others can proceed smoothly.

As the Provisional Technical Secretariat becomes increasingly occupied with its accelerating responsibilities for recruitment, training, data handling and other activities, it will have less time available for providing technical services to the Commission, making it all the more important for the Commission to accelerate its work now.

And fourth, the Commission must decide on additional space to accommodate the growing staff of the Technical Secretariat until its permanent headquarters can be built and occupied.

This is not to say that a great deal has not already been accomplished by the Commission and the Secretariat. Moreover, on many outstanding issues, the Secretariat has delineated a range of workable solutions that now require political choice by the Commission. So, the main job of determining when and how successfully the CWC enters into force lies in national capitals.

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