



## **Opening Remarks by the OPCW Deputy Director-General at the UN Disarmament Fellowship Programme**

**As delivered on 16 September 2019, The Hague, Netherlands**

Distinguished Disarmament Fellows,  
Dear Colleagues,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to welcome you to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. The OPCW has been proud to be part of the UN Disarmament Fellowship Programme for more than two decades and we are delighted to host you again this year.

As diplomats and officials who will be involved in the disarmament and non-proliferation architecture, you have an important role to play in global security. Since its entry into force 22 years ago, the Chemical Weapons Convention has become one of the cornerstones of that architecture.

Today you will hear from staff members from across our organisation on the day-to-day efforts to implement the Convention. Our goal is to help you develop a clear picture about how the OPCW is contributing to disarmament and non-proliferation within the wider context of international peace and security.

Indeed, the Convention serves as a testament to the international community's commitment to a world free of chemical weapons and is one of the most successful global disarmament treaties. It is the first and only instrument with the aim of verifiably abolishing an entire category of weapons of mass destruction. With 193 States Parties, the Convention has the highest number of adherents of any multilateral disarmament instrument.

Over the last 22 years, the OPCW has made steady progress towards achieving its founding goal to rid the world of chemical weapons. At present, the OPCW has verified the complete and irreversible destruction of over 97% of some 72,000 metric tonnes of declared chemical weapon stockpiles. As such, the goal of chemical disarmament is well within our reach, with the United States, the last declared possessor State Party, on track to complete its destruction process by 2023.

The OPCW's extensive verification regime builds trust and confidence in the work of the Organisation. Since the Convention's entry into force, over 3,200 inspections have been conducted in chemical weapon destruction facilities to ensure that disarmament obligations are being met.

These activities to uphold the main objective of the Convention – namely, “to exclude completely the possibility of the use of chemical weapons” – have made a tangible difference to global security. This was recognised in 2013 when the OPCW received the Nobel Peace Prize.

While the Organisation’s achievements have been substantial, there have been challenges. The same year the OPCW received the Nobel Prize, we embarked on a challenging mission in Syria. The Organisation was tasked with verifying the removal and destruction of over 1,300 metric tonnes of declared chemical weapons in an active conflict zone. Never before had we undertaken such a complicated and dangerous mission within such a tight timeframe. In cooperation with the United Nations and 30 States Parties, we completed the elimination of Syria’s declared chemical weapons programme by the end of 2014. Unfortunately, today our mission in Syria continues. The OPCW continues to address a range of chemical weapons-related issues in that country. This morning, you will be given a full briefing about our ongoing work in Syria.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Although the destruction of all declared chemical weapons is in sight, the threat from these armaments remains. The danger of non-State actors acquiring and using toxic chemicals for hostile purposes is no longer a theoretical possibility, but a tragic reality. Looking to the future, the OPCW is shifting our focus to preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons. This is a complex challenge involving a broad set of stakeholders including scientists, industry, and diplomats like yourselves.

Full implementation of the Convention at the national level is the first line of defence in preventing re-emergence. To assist States Parties in this area, the OPCW offers training and workshops for legal drafters and legislators to assist in developing national legislation.

Keeping pace with developments in science and technology and bolstering our verification regime will also be critical. To this end, we have initiated a project to upgrade our Laboratory to become a Centre for Chemistry and Technology. The project will also support our important capacity building efforts. Helping States Parties to enjoy the full benefits of chemistry will continue to be a priority for the OPCW. I am pleased you will have the opportunity to visit the Laboratory tomorrow and hear more about its critical role in our work.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The OPCW continues to adapt to meet the needs of our Member States and to face the challenges ahead. As the new generation of disarmament leaders, you too will need to be creative and agile. I hope that the contacts you make, and what you learn here, serve you well in your future careers, and help you make a productive impact on the future of disarmament.

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