



ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

“Abolishing Chemical Weapons: 20 Years On”

Lecture by Director-General Ambassador Ahmet Üzümcü

At Georgetown University’s School of Foreign Service in Qatar

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LECTURE AS DELIVERED

Honorable Dean Professor James Anderson,

Chairman and Members of the Committee of the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons,

Faculty members,

Dear Students,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to speak at the Georgetown University’s School of Foreign Service in Qatar.

A long and rich history of academic excellence is associated with the name of this institution. Its educational goals have always included respect for and understanding of the variety of beliefs and cultures that make our world.

The need for inculcating such positive attitudes is greater today than ever before. The international system designed to enable nations to exist in conditions of peace and with opportunities for progress cannot be taken for granted. We have to work consistently to support and to strengthen it in the interest of global peace and security.

Universally shared norms and values are a defining feature of this system. These often find expression in agreements and treaties between nations.

The passage of time only reconfirms that such a framework of agreements is the most appropriate and feasible means to deal with global challenges and to sustain a shared hope for the future.

The calculus for peace has long included the search for eliminating the most dangerous types of warfare. Disarmament, especially, as it concerns weapons of mass destruction has long been on the international agenda. It was the subject of the very first resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in January 1946.

Disarmament is not a utopian ideal as suggested by some. The resolution of 1946 was the first step towards realising the aspirations of the UN's founding nations. This is expressed in the words of the Charter: "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind".

Since that time 70 years ago, there have been a series of international agreements and treaties that seek to deal with the threats posed by weapons of mass destruction.

None, however, is as far reaching and as stringent in its application as the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). The Convention and its implementing body; the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (the OPCW) have now been in operation for almost two decades.

29 April 2017 will mark the 20th anniversary of the OPCW's establishment. Approaching that landmark offers a good opportunity to review the Organisation's balance sheet in terms of the progress made towards defined goals and what the future might hold.

The Convention is counted as a major disarmament treaty. But it really evolved in response to a deeply felt humanitarian imperative. I have used the term 'evolved' because it captures the progression of efforts spanning more than a century.

The use of chemical weapons has long been regarded as contrary to the norms of customary international law. They fall under the category of weapons of mass destruction precisely because of their devastating and indiscriminate effects. Poison gas, as these weapons were once called, spreads insidiously laying waste to any life in its path be that man, woman or child. It is a cruel method of warfare made increasingly by more barbaric by the unethical exploitation of science.

The Convention was concluded in 1992 after dedicated work spanning nearly the entire twentieth century. There had been earlier initiatives such as the St. Petersburg Declaration issued as far back as 1868 and The Hague Declaration of 1899. These had sought to prevent the scientific revolution from introducing into the military arena products and weapons that contravened generally accepted rules of warfare.

The objectives of these legal instruments, however, remained unfulfilled. Chemical weapons were used on a massive scale during the First World War. In all 1.3 million casualties resulted with nearly 100,000 dead. Never before had the world seen carnage of this nature and on this scale.

That tragic experience propelled a search for a legal remedy to be observed by all nations. It led to adoption of the Geneva Protocol in 1925.

The Geneva Protocol banned the use of chemical and biological weapons. It did not, however, prohibit their production, development or stockpiling. This proved to be a major loophole. Several countries continued to produce huge quantities of chemical weapons which largely

remained unused.

However, chemical weapons or toxic chemicals have been used in the ongoing civil war in Syria, and before that by the Saddam regime in its war against Iran and against its own people in Halabja.

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Against this long and tragic history, the conclusion of the CWC and its entry into force in 1997 marked a watershed. The international community's long-standing efforts to comprehensively ban chemical weapons had finally become a reality. The Convention is the first multilateral treaty that bans an entire class of weapons of mass destruction.

It establishes rights and obligations of far-reaching scope. The Convention is comprehensive and non-discriminatory. It prohibits the development, production, stockpiling, transfer, retention and use of chemical weapons by States Parties, under conditions of strict international verification.

The Convention makes no exceptions in prohibiting the possession of chemical weapons. All States Parties have equal rights and obligations, and those who possess chemical weapons must destroy their stockpiles. States Parties are also required to ensure that, within their jurisdiction, chemistry is only used for peaceful purposes.

The total quantity of chemical warfare agents declared to the OPCW amounted to over 71,000 tonnes. 94% of these weapons have already been destroyed under verification by the OPCW. This is an historic achievement which is also recognised by the Nobel Peace Prize Committee in 2013 by awarding the prize to the OPCW.

The stockpiles of chemical weapons represent large quantities of highly lethal substances. Destroying them is dangerous, time-consuming and costly undertaking.

The two largest possessor States, namely Russia and the United States, are both progressing steadily towards the end goal of complete destruction of their stockpiles. This is expected to be completed by the year 2023.

All countries with chemical plants that are regarded as capable under the Convention, must allow inspections by the OPCW. The purpose of these inspections is to verify that the production or consumption of relevant chemicals and precursors is only for legitimate activities.

Since its inception, the Organisation has conducted nearly 3400 industry inspections to verify that the production and consumption of relevant chemicals remains confined for solely peaceful purposes.

The Convention also establishes a challenge-inspection mechanism which has never been invoked thus far. However, this mechanism is significant for its deterrent value and as a verification tool to address well founded concerns about non-compliance. The Secretariat has steadily enhanced its readiness to conduct such an inspection should a State Party ever request it.

A multilateral organisation is a model of diversity. Amongst our Membership are countries with advanced chemical industry as well as those with hardly any. In between there is a range of countries whose economies are developing or in transition.

The Convention is described as having four pillars. Disarmament and non-proliferation are the two pillars that serve the core security interests of the entire membership. The other two pillars are international cooperation, and, assistance and protection against chemical weapons.

The OPCW seeks to foster peaceful uses of chemistry. The Convention provides for the promotion of international cooperation and the exchange of scientific and technological information in the field of peaceful chemical activities. In this context, the Organisation has established a wide range of programmes including, for instance, the training of young chemists in industrial best practices and the promotion of analytical laboratory skills.

States Parties also undertake to provide assistance to other members should chemical weapons ever be used, or threatened to be used, against them. This in fact is an essential part of the security assurance that States receive by joining the Convention.

For this mechanism to be effective, we work extensively with Member States to ensure that an adequate emergency response capacity is available at all times should the need ever arise.

As part of such preparedness, we have recently been engaged in the setting up of a Rapid Response and Assistance Mission (RRAM) to be deployed upon possible requests from our members for emergency measures of assistance in the case of use of chemical weapons.

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Despite the long strides we have taken towards their abolition as recent as August of 2013, the world witnessed the heart rending spectacle of scores of bodies of children lined together – victims of a chemical attack brutally unleashed on Ghouta - a densely populated suburb of Damascus.

Those attacks set in motion a series of events that culminated in Syria’s decision to accede to the Convention.

That step helped diffuse what seemed like a major international conflict. Syria’s joined the Convention following an agreement negotiated in Geneva by the Russian Federation and the United States on 14 September.

On 27 September, the OPCW Executive Council adopted a decision on the elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme.

This decision was endorsed by United Nations Security Council resolution 2118 (2013) on the same day.

Given the on-going armed conflict, an accelerated plan of elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme was established by the Executive Council. This represented an unprecedented challenge for the OPCW which was required to operate in an active war zone in order to oversee the destruction of a major chemical weapons programme and to do so with ambitious target dates.

Within days of these decisions, our inspectors were deployed. Following consultations between myself and the UN Secretary-General, the establishment of an OPCW-UN Joint Mission to oversee the implementation of the disarmament programme in Syria was announced.

The crucial initial tasks were successfully completed within a months' time. These included providing assistance to the Syrian Arab Republic in submitting the initial declaration of its chemical weapons programme, verifying chemical weapons production and storage sites and completing the functional destruction of chemical weapons production, mixing and filling facilities.

What followed was again an operation that has no historical parallels. With the support of more than 30 of our Member States, the bulk of chemical weapons material was removed from Syria and destroyed outside its territory.

The United States provided facilities necessary to neutralize the most dangerous chemicals on board a naval vessel at sea.

This required a major multinational maritime transport operation to enable the removal and transport of the Syrian chemicals at sea. For this purpose, Denmark and Norway provided two cargo ships, which were given security cover by vessels from China, the Russian Federation and the United Kingdom. Italy allowed the use of its port at Gioia Tauro for priority chemicals brought from the Syrian Arab Republic by cargo vessels to be transferred onto the United States ship MV Cape Ray for destruction at sea.

The destruction of chemicals removed from Syria occurred at commercial chemical disposal facilities located in different Member States. The services of these companies were acquired through a process of international tenders. These chemicals included binary chemical weapon components and associated reaction masses. A massive procurement and delivery operation was carried out to provide Syria the materials and equipment necessary for the safe packaging and transportation of chemicals to the port of embarkation.

The removal and destruction of Syria's chemical weapons did not conclude our work in that country.

In the face of continuing allegations that chlorine had been used as a chemical weapon, I established a Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) in April 2014.

On 27 May, in an attempt to visit a location that had allegedly been attacked with chlorine in the Hama province, the FFM came under armed attack by an unknown party.

Fortunately, all the team members remained unharmed and returned to safety. While an incident such as this could have derailed the entire Mission, it was nonetheless able to complete its enquiry and issued its reports concluding with a high degree of confidence that chlorine had in fact been used a weapon.

Since then, the Fact Finding Mission has examined a significant number of other incidents and substantiated the use of chlorine as a weapon in other cases as well. It has also confirmed an instance of the use of sulfur mustard.

The Fact Finding Mission's mandate was confined to establishing whether or not chlorine or other toxic substances had been used as weapons. It did not go further into any attribution.

In response to the findings of the FFM, In August last year, the Security Council adopted a

resolution establishing the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism.

It is this mechanism which is mandated to identify the perpetrators of chemical weapon attacks in Syria. It has recently reported its disturbing findings to the UN Security Council re-confirming the use of chemical weapons in the conflict in Syria.

Adding to the complexity of our work in Syria is the question of clarifying certain elements of the Syrian Arab Republic's declaration of its chemical weapons programme.

A team of experts from the OPCW Secretariat called the Declaration Assessment Team has been engaged since April 2014 with Syria in an effort to clarify several outstanding issues.

The purpose of this exercise is to arrive at a declaration that will be regarded by our States Parties as complete and accurate. I have continued to underscore to my Syrian interlocuters the necessity of bringing this matter to a closure through the provision of necessary documentation as well as scientifically and technically plausible explanations on the unresolved questions.

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The mechanisms for verification contained in disarmament treaties are designed for execution during peace time. The OPCW was called upon to coordinate a major disarmament operation in an extremely risky environment.

The ability to continue to effectively respond to contingencies will not be the only challenge for us in the future.

Not too long ago, the strong support for the global ban on chemical weapons - evident in the rapid growth in the membership of the OPCW - had seemed to preclude any further instances of aggression involving chemical weapons.

We know from recent developments that there is, however, no room for complacency. Chemical weapons have continued to be used.

It is difficult to comprehend the perverse mentality that shows such blatant disregard for human life. But that tragically remains the reality; a reality that serves a cold reminder. Human progress for all its achievements is not in itself a guarantor of peace.

We have to continually and consciously work for peace. And this cannot be accomplished without concerted efforts, without rising above national interests and without continually strengthening the global institutions that are indispensable to this endeavour.

Despite the existence of one of the most successful disarmament treaties ever, the violation of its fundamental prohibitions is a matter of serious concern. This also means that our work is far from over. Getting the world to agree on a norm requires hard work; to make that norm truly universal and enduring is even more challenging.

The motto of our Organisation is 'working together for a world free from chemical weapons'. A significant factor obstructing this vision is non-adherence by a handful of States that remain outside the Convention.

I continue to use every opportunity to stress the importance of Egypt, Israel, North Korea and South Sudan joining the Convention at the earliest.

South Sudan is actively considering its membership. Israel and Egypt express reservations based on what they consider regional security considerations.

Quite the contrary, their acceptance of the Convention can only help promote a climate of trust and will benefit regional and global security.

A truly universal Convention will impart even greater authority to measures against threats that affect all nations. The threat from terrorists represents an ever present danger. We know from recent investigations that DAESH has in fact used chemical weapons in Syria and in Iraq.

The international legal framework offers several avenues for greater cooperation and coordination between international organisations in the context of counter-terrorism.

The OPCW's open-ended working group on terrorism regularly reviews such mechanisms and opportunities for enhanced interaction and coordination. At the same time, our Member States have stressed that the Chemical Weapons Convention already has a sound legal framework.

Effective enforcement of this framework would serve to criminalise the development, production, stockpiling and transfer of chemical weapons or the use of toxic chemicals as weapons by all natural or legal persons under the jurisdiction of individual States Parties.

In other words, the full and effective implementation of the Convention under the domestic laws of all 192 of our Member States and greater controls over substances of concern is the best prescription to prevent acts of chemical terrorism.

A legal framework through legislation and the means to enforce it create the domestic capacity to monitor, to report, and to guide activities involving chemicals along peaceful and productive lines.

We assist our States Parties in this important area through training programmes, information-sharing and capacity-building activities. These are designed to promote best practices in legal processes and enforcement.

There was a time after the Convention came into force in 1997 when a major part of our effort and resources were focused on verifying the destruction of huge quantities of declared chemical weapons. This is understandable. The world wanted to finally bury a nasty legacy spanning most of the last century. It was also keen for a decisive reversal of a mind-set that marked the Cold War.

The experiences of the last few years have taught us there are now more complex dynamics at work. The extraordinary missions carried out by the OPCW in Syria and Libya, the continuing use of chemical weapons, the threat of terrorism and the rapid advances in science and technology highlight the need for more not less attention to the task of strengthening the norms of the Convention.

In order to prevent the re-emergence of chemical weapons, its verification regime must keep pace with the growing number of chemical facilities and capabilities that did not exist at the time

the Convention was negotiated. We also need to keep a close watch on the impact of emerging technologies.

Monitoring and inspection activities cannot cover the entire global chemical industry given its scope and scale. What is important is to enhance our engagement and outreach, and to nurture a culture of responsible science in our research institutions, universities, and in our schools. The aim should be to develop and promote professional ethics that support the aims of the CWC.

The OPCW Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) comprises eminent experts and is tasked with the responsibility to keep developments in science and technology under review. Their work will continue to assume increasing importance.

Together with the scientific and technical work of the SAB, OPCW has made education and outreach a core part of our activities.

For this purpose, an Advisory Board on Education and Outreach has recently been established. This body will guide our development of new activities, materials and e-learning tools to increase awareness of the dangers posed by the possible misuse of dual-use technology. They will also help us to expand our reach into universities and schools.

Additionally, we have facilitated discussions by scientists from across the globe, who developed the Hague Guidelines – a code of ethics for chemistry professionals. These guidelines are intended to serve as a practical baseline for adoption by scientific and industry associations, and have attracted a favourable response. You may have access to it on our website.

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In a world that sometimes finds it difficult to agree on issues of international importance, the CWC and the OPCW have stood out as an example of the success of multilateralism.

The achievements of this Organisation represent the strong international consensus against chemical weapons.

After 20 years of implementing a major international treaty, our experience teaches us one key lesson. We cannot rest on our laurels. What we have achieved is valuable. It represents an advancement only in the field of disarmament but also towards humanitarian ideals. But we must continue to work together to promote this ethos.

The unique experience of the OPCW in creating an excellent multilateral cooperative environment can inspire other international initiatives for peace and security.

The pre-requisites for such collective efforts are commitment to common goals and to compliance with agreed objectives.

The Convention and the OPCW constitute an essential part of the global system designed to enhance international peace and security. I feel confident that the Organisation will continue to play a major role in making our world a safer place for us and for future generations.

Thank you.