



ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

Green Chemistry Workshop: Green And Sustainable

Opening Remarks of the Director-General of the OPCW, Ambassador Ahmet Üzümcü

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REMARKS AS DELIVERED

Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure and an honour to welcome you to the OPCW Headquarters for the second workshop on green and sustainable chemistry. Finding safer alternatives and processes in chemistry to mitigate risks associated with toxic chemicals has been an ongoing quest for many stakeholders. While pursuing different approaches, the scientific community, the chemical industry, civil society, and others, have all been motivated by the same goal: sustainable, safe, and secure chemistry for the well-being of our peoples.

In this context, over the past decades green and sustainable chemistry has emerged as the preferred approach, and continues to be of growing interest as a domain for minimizing the risk of harmful by-products and promoting development. It gives me a great sense of satisfaction to see a wide range of experts here from government, industry, and academia who will share their views and ideas on this important topic.

Over the last two decades, we have seen Asia becoming the major region for investment by the global chemical industry. We may expect a similar phenomenon to occur in Africa or elsewhere. Ensuring the safety of people and protecting the environment against hazardous and toxic chemicals also involves several international environmental and security agreements which set up different regimes to cover chemicals. These regimes are operating in a challenging global setting in which the chemical industry is changing radically. We are witnessing impressive developments and advances in chemical science, technology, and manufacturing. The global trade in chemicals is also expanding exponentially. While at the same time, new security risks are emerging. The threat from non-state-actors is growing ever-larger. These trends are shaping the future agenda of the global chemical industry, the OPCW, as well as numerous other international environmental and security institutions.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Promoting the peaceful uses of chemistry and nurturing a culture of safety and security among chemistry professionals is at the heart of the OPCW's mandate, and constitutes a fundamental element of our work. 20 years since the entry into force of the CWC, the OPCW as the custodian of the Convention has verified destruction of over 96% of the world's declared chemical weapon stockpiles. We are close to our goal of a chemical weapons free world. But to safeguard the significant gains we have made, we need to ensure that we are well positioned to address the risks concerning the misuse of chemicals. Our reasons for doing so are quite simple: chemicals can do great harm to people and to the environment.

As the total elimination of declared stockpiles moves nearer to becoming a reality, the focus of the OPCW must shift from destruction to the prevention of the re-emergence of chemical weapons. Simultaneously, we must continue to promote international cooperation in the peaceful applications of chemistry. Achieving these dual goals will require engagement, collaboration, and partnership-building with a range of stakeholders from across our societies, scientific communities, and industrial sectors. Remarkable advances in science and technology, are helping to ensure a sustainable future for all of us, in addition to directly benefiting our work at the OPCW. However, new and emerging challenges to our security, such as the threat of chemical terrorism, coupled with the accessibility of many toxic chemicals from industrial sites and the supply chain, mean that we cannot afford to be complacent.

Of specific interest to our discussion here today is the enormous progress made in the field of green and sustainable chemistry and other approaches aimed at promoting safer and more environmentally-friendly options. Nowadays, more and more chemical companies are willing to invest in sustainability, social responsibility, respect for the environment, and security issues. This sort of investment enhances their reputation and standing in the communities they seek to serve. The International Council of Chemical Associations has, for example, overseen the Responsible Care initiative, which seeks to commit industry to achieve excellence in public health, environmental safety, and security performance.

All of this, of course, is relevant for promoting one of the key responsibilities of States Parties to the CWC – namely, chemical safety and security in the industrial process. The Technical Secretariat of the OPCW is doing its part to assist our Member States, including through its International Cooperation Programme on Integrated Chemicals Management, which comprises the three key elements of safety, security, and sustainability. To maintain this engagement, interaction will be important given the overlapping interests and shared concerns. During the OPCW's first expert group meeting on green chemistry last April, participants shared their views on the OPCW's potential role in the evolving climate of safety, security, and sustainability. Today's workshop provides a further opportunity to deepen dialogue between scientists, industry, and other stakeholders on such issues.

As prominent experts and industry representatives, we encourage you to consider, discuss, and exchange views on different approaches to and definitions of green and sustainable chemistry. In addition, you should aim to reach a mutual understanding of the issues that matter to your respective sectors and communities.

We also expect that this platform will allow you to explore the potential contribution of green and sustainable chemistry to promoting the goals of the Convention. Discussions of this kind will help recognise the gaps on which different stakeholders may cooperate and the potential contribution of the OPCW to facilitating such partnerships. I hope that you will use this meeting to share your experiences, showcase best practices, and identify opportunities. The OPCW's motto "Working together for a world free of chemical weapons" underlines that we all share the responsibility of achieving that goal, as well as reap the rewards of its realisation.

Thank you.
