

*Opening Remarks by Director-General*

**13<sup>th</sup> Regional Meeting of National Authorities in Africa**

**Algiers, Algeria**

**Ambassador Ahmet Üzümcü**

**Director-General, OPCW**

**2 June 2015**

Major General Djamel Gueroui,

Distinguished Generals,

Her Excellency Ambassador Baghli,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

General Gueroui, thank you very much for your many kind words of welcome and your warm hospitality.

I am honoured to welcome you to the 13th Regional Meeting of National Authorities in Africa.

At the outset, I would like to express my appreciation to the Government of Algeria for its warm hospitality and continuing support towards the aims of chemical disarmament and security.

I further thank the National Authority of Algeria for the excellent organisation of this event.

The African Regional Group holds great significance for the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Comprised of 51 States Parties, this region represents great potential and the demographic dividend of a young population.

As National Authorities in this region, you play an instrumental role in advancing our common goal of a world free from chemical weapons.

Africa will remain crucial to safeguarding the norm against chemical weapons in the future, as our focus will shift from disarmament to preventing the re-emergence of these weapons.

Thirty-four OPCW Member States are represented by National Authorities at this meeting.

Your presence demonstrates your country's commitment towards implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

I would like to note the presence of two individuals in particular at this meeting:

Prof. Djafer Benachour, Chairperson of the OPCW Technical Working Group on Education and Outreach; and

Dr Philip Coleman, member of the OPCW Scientific Advisory Board Technical Working Group on Education and Outreach.

I have no doubts that you will both be making valuable contributions to this meeting, and I thank you for the contributions you have made to date to our Organisation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

When we talk about the universality of the Chemical Weapons Convention, it should be measured not only by the number of States which have signed the treaty, but also by wider public awareness and practical support for its principles.

This is why education and outreach initiatives are fundamental for advancing non-proliferation and enhancing chemical safety and security.

For a world free of chemical weapons will be built not only in meetings such as these, but also in laboratories, universities, and the private sector.

In recognition of the importance of education and outreach for furthering our mission, the Technical Working Group for this subject recommended that education and outreach areas become core business for the OPCW.

I am pleased that this regional meeting of National Authorities is combined with a meeting on education and outreach. As such, it clearly demonstrates the increasing priority placed on this area.

Thanks to the tireless efforts of its National Authorities, the African Region has been able record progress in implementing the Convention.

Although the progress we have made together is significant, we need to further strengthen the capacity of the region – and to close some gaps – to stay on top of new developments and respond to new challenges.

Currently, only 32 out of 50 National Authorities in the region currently have legislation covering initial measures.

In this respect, I call on all States Parties to enact legislation for the effective implementation of the Convention, and assure that the OPCW will continue to provide support and assistance in this important area.

The Secretariat will also continue to support State Parties through its National Authorities Mentorship, Legal Internship, and Associate Programmes.

It is no secret that the effort against harmful uses of toxic chemicals cannot be waged in isolation by a single organisation or state.

This effort must be comprised of a broad range of initiatives and partnerships.

Networks of assistance and protection must be maintained and strengthened.

Chemical safety must be bolstered by effective standards and forward-leaning engagement with industry.

Our interactions with industry must remain efficient and transparent, as this represents a vital building block of our work.

As such, verification of Article VI industry sites will become increasingly important to our work going ahead.

Critically, robust national legislation and monitoring of compliance need to be hallmarks of our national implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

To accomplish these goals, we must strengthen the national institutions that stand at the vanguard of chemical disarmament and safety.

Through partnerships and exchange of best practices, it is my hope that this meeting will seek new horizons for regional cooperation. This has become even more important in view of the perceived increased threat of use of CWs by non State Actors.

As a useful input to these discussions, I am pleased that the National Authority of Argentina is present at this meeting to impart lessons learned from another OPCW Region.

The Argentine National Authority has been a pioneer in launching and implementing a national education and outreach programme. I hope the participation of the Argentine colleague in this gathering will stimulate discussions and bring new ideas and insights to the table. I should also mention here that we are making progress on the establishment of the Advisory Board on Education and Outreach.

We also recognise the importance of engaging with regional and international organizations.

The African Union (AU) whom is represented today and its regional economic communities can be a key contributor in this regard, and more can be done to activate the OPCW's arrangements with the AU.

I should note that this meeting comes at a historic time for the OPCW and its States Parties.

This past April, we commemorated the centenary of the first large-scale use of chemical weapons near Ieper, on the battlefields of Belgium during World War I.

On 22 April 1915, Allied troops came under attack by a new form of warfare.

Ten thousand casualties would result from the use of chlorine gas that day.

Throughout World War I, the cruel and indiscriminate use of chlorine gas and other toxic agents throughout would kill nearly 100,000 people.

Another million would be grievously affected, many with painful, lifelong damage to their health.

The century that followed would see numerous occasions where the science of chemistry was applied with intent to kill and injure.

On many of these occasions, the lives of innocents would be taken by such weapons.

To reaffirm global condemnation against such weapons and reassert our commitment to a world safe from their use, our 190 States Parties issued the *Ieper Declaration* at a historic meeting on 21 April this year.

This important document underscores the role of the Chemical Weapons Convention as a safeguard against chemical weapons, and condemns their use under any circumstances by anyone.

At the Ieper event, we paid tribute to those who have fallen victim to chemical weapons, and reiterated our commitment to completely eradicate such weapons.

During the Ieper meeting, a short film “Remembering Ieper” was screened for participants.

The film will be shown here this morning, and I encourage you to share it with colleagues and associates in person and through social media.

It puts in clear historical perspective the important mission we are engaged in.

Ladies and gentlemen,

By ensuring the strength and accountability of the national institutions that safeguard the Chemical Weapons Convention, we in turn make tangible progress towards a world of peaceful chemistry – and a world free of chemical weapons.

I am confident that this meeting will advance our collective efforts to strengthen the implementation – and broaden the understanding – of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

I wish you every success in this meeting.

Thank you.