

Twenty-Fifth Session of the Scientific Advisory Board

Remarks by the Director-General

27 March 2017

Mr Chairperson,
Distinguished members of the Scientific Advisory Board,
Dear colleagues,

I am very pleased to welcome you to the 25th Session of the Scientific Advisory Board.

At the outset, I would like to convey my appreciation to all Members of the Board. Your work has been exemplary.

While improving the science-policymaker interaction your role has become more visible and operational. Your advice and inputs ensure that the scientific and technical dimensions receive due consideration in the OPCW's work.

I convey special thanks to the Chair, Dr Timperley, and Vice-Chair, Mr Tang, for facilitating the work of the Board with skill and dedication.

Let me also take this opportunity to welcome the new members of the Board, Dr Pål Aas of Norway, Dr Renate Becker-Arnold of Germany, Dr Evandro De Souza Nogueira of Brazil, and Professor Ahmed Saeed of Sudan. I look forward to hearing of your contributions to this key forum.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This session of the Board is the first in our Twentieth Anniversary year. These 20 years have seen 192 States Parties joining the Convention and nearly 95% of declared chemical weapons stockpiles permanently destroyed. Our progress has been supported throughout its course by expert advice from this Board.

As we observe this milestone, we draw inspiration from the past, and we turn our sights to shaping the future. For now, more than any other time in our existence, one thing is clear: future challenges will be very different from those of the past.

Going forward, we must do more than just destroy chemical weapons. We must prevent such weapons from ever again re-emerging in any form.

We must remain vigilant in the face of this threat. Disturbing reports of chemical attacks continue to emerge from Syria, Iraq, and now Malaysia.

This compels us to think imaginatively, and act responsibly. We must work with States Parties to prevent the misuse of chemicals and to ensure that they are handled safely and securely.

The wise counsel of this Board is grounded in scientific and technical realities. States Parties may not take forward all of your advice, but they are better served and informed through its consideration. To this end, we rely on you to challenge our assumptions and stimulate discussions.

I wish to thank Mr Tang for his briefing to the Open-Ended Working Group on the Future Priorities of the OPCW in January.

His presentation on how science and technology might fill potential gaps in the verification regime sparked interest and discussion amongst States Parties. I look forward to further deliberations on the issues he raised,

Distinguished Board members,

Sampling and analysis are at the heart of the verification regime. The designated laboratory network plays a vital role in this area by carrying out state-of-the-art analytical chemistry, while facilitating international scientific collaboration.

As the demand for laboratory services continues to grow, the briefings you will receive on toxin analysis and innovative monitoring technologies could not be more timely.

In response to your recommendation, I am requesting the Board to establish a temporary working group (TWG) on investigative science and technology. You will review the terms of reference and select a chair this week.

This TWG will inform us about the capabilities necessary to remain fit-for-purpose to prevent the re-emergence of chemical weapons. The work of this TWG is of particular relevance to the work of our laboratory and to inspector training. To this end, you will be briefed on OPCW's training activities tomorrow.

Your report on scientific developments for the Fourth review Conference provides another opportunity for you to address the technical dimensions of future needs and challenges.

This report will serve as a key document for the Conference, and I look forward to seeing its progress over the course of 2017.

I am pleased to see that the International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry (IUPAC) is co-organiser of your upcoming workshop on emerging technologies.

I signed a memorandum of understanding with IUPAC during the 21st Conference of the States Parties in 2016, hoping that our partnership with the chemistry community remains strong and our cooperation becomes structured. IUPAC's contribution to your work builds on this commitment. I also intend to address the opening ceremony of the IUPAC 46th World Chemistry Congress just a few days after your workshop concludes.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Recent events demonstrate that the OPCW's mission is as important as ever, and technical expertise and knowledge are needed to face the challenges before us.

As we reflect on where we are, we must recognise that many of the challenges at hand, also present opportunities – especially those that can be realised through translating science into viable policy options to strengthen the CWC regime.

Expert advice is but one dimension of the great contributions of this Board. We also highly value your voices as advocates for the work of the OPCW with your peers at home and across the globe.

This is especially important at a time when we are seeking to make deeper inroads in academia, scientific communities, industry and civil society.

Before closing, I wish to thank the three members of the Board for whom this session of the SAB will be their last.

Professor Florida Arsciwals Cariño of the Philippines, Professor Mongia Said Zina of Tunisia and Professor Volodymyr Zaitsev of Ukraine. You have all served on this Board with devotion and distinction, making important contributions and providing valuable advice. I look forward to hearing of your continued success.

Please allow me to welcome all of you here at OPCW Headquarters, once again, and I wish you a productive 25th Session.

Thank you.