

DISARMAMENT

Address to the Committee on Hemispheric Security of the Organisation of American States by OPCW Director-General Ambassador Rogelio Pflirter
Washington D.C., USA, 12 April 2005

Excerpts:

There have been significant developments since that time, not least of all within this region, and under the auspices of this Organisation and the Committee on Hemispheric Security itself.

I am extremely gratified by the kind invitation extended to me by Her Excellency, Ambassador Carmen Marina Gutiérrez, Permanent Representative of Nicaragua to the OAS, and Chair of the Committee, and by the increasing level of cooperation between the OAS and the OPCW. This cooperation continues to intensify since the adoption on 8 June 2004 of the OAS General Assembly Resolution 2000 (XXXIV-O/04) on the establishment of the Americas as a biological- and chemical- weapons free zone.

I view this initiative as extremely important. It is the first explicit recognition in any region of the world – and universally accepted by all the countries of a region – of the need for the creation of such a zone in relation to these categories of weapons of mass destruction. There is further work to be done to turn this recognition into reality.

There are already a number of treaties and other instruments in existence or in the making in relation to nuclear-weapons-free zones – in Latin America and the Caribbean (under the Treaty of Tlatelolco), in the Pacific (under the Treaty of Rarotonga), in Africa (under the Treaty of Pelindaba), and in Asia (under the Bangkok Treaty for South-East Asia, as well as other initiatives in Mongolia and Central Asia).

However, the promotion of zones free of other weapons of mass destruction such as chemical and bacteriological (biological) and toxin weapons has taken on increasing urgency. This reflects the risks posed by the possibility of terrorist groups and other non-state actors acquiring such weapons and their precursors, and developing and using them in pursuit of their goals.

Article I of the Chemical Weapons Convention bans activities by States Parties relating to chemical weapons “under any circumstances”, including to develop, produce, otherwise acquire, stockpile, retain, transfer, use, or engage in any military preparations for using chemical weapons, or to assist, encourage or induce, in any way, anyone to engage in any prohibited activity. It also bans the use of riot control agents as a method of warfare. Thus, the prohibitions on chemical weapons are comprehensive.

In addition, Article VII of the Convention requires each State Party to enact legislation, including penal legislation, to prohibit, prosecute and punish natural and legal persons from engaging in any activity prohibited to a State Party under the Convention, and to cooperate with other States Parties and afford appropriate legal assistance.

Therefore, the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention are pursuing with renewed vigour the goals of complete universality, and the full and effective implementation of the Convention in all regions of the world. Two Action Plans have been developed on these topics by the OPCW's policy-making organs, based on recommendations made by the First Review Conference on the CWC in May 2003. It is only with universal adherence to the Convention, and implementation of all of its provisions, that we can ensure that there are no safe havens on the face of the earth for those who would seek to acquire or use chemical weapons.

We have already seen considerable results from these efforts. The Chemical Weapons Convention currently brings together a total of 167¹ States Parties. Growth in membership has for the most part been rapid and steady. All the Permanent Members of the United Nations Security Council are States Parties, as are all the countries in Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States, and the entire continents of North and South America. Small numbers of States not Party to the Convention remain in Africa and the Middle East, in Asia and the Pacific Islands, and in Central America and the Caribbean. The Convention now covers 95% of the earth's population and land mass, and more than 98% of global chemical industry.

A significant development in 2004 was the accession by Libya, and its declaration of a stockpile of chemical weapons and associated equipment and facilities. The destruction of this arsenal is already well under way, resulting in a tangible contribution to international peace and security in the Middle East and beyond.

Many other new States Parties joined during 2004 from Africa, the Pacific Islands, and the Caribbean. In June 2004, we welcomed Saint Kitts and Nevis as the most recent State Party to the Convention from the OAS membership. Subsequently, in November, the OPCW held a regional workshop on the universality and implementation of the Convention in Saint Kitts and Nevis, in recognition of the efforts made by one of the smallest countries both in the region and on a global level.

This workshop followed similar universality- and implementation-related regional and sub-regional events carried out by the OPCW in the past few years in Brazil, Chile, Jamaica, the Netherlands Antilles, Nicaragua, Panama, Saint Lucia, and Suriname. Already, 28 of the 35 members of the OAS are States Parties to the Convention.

Five OAS members – the Bahamas, Dominican Republic, Grenada², Haiti, and Honduras – signed the Convention in the period between 1993 and 1997, and I urge each of these countries to ensure that their instruments of ratification are deposited as soon as possible with the Secretary-General of the United Nations in New York.

Following bilateral assistance from the OPCW and France, the Parliament of Haiti gave its approval to CWC ratification in 2004. I have written to the President, the Prime Minister, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, to encourage them to take the final procedural steps at this time, as a contribution to global and regional peace and security. Last October, bilateral assistance was also provided to Bahamas, as well as to Antigua and Barbuda, and a national training course is being organised in the

¹ There are 169 States Parties as at 3 July 2005 with Grenada's ratification of the CWC

² Grenada is a Contracting State Party and the CWC will enter into force for Grenada on 3 July 2005

Bahamas in the second half of this year, to which other States not Party to the Convention will be invited. Similarly, assistance visits are under consideration for the Dominican Republic, Grenada, and Honduras.

As you are very much aware, Grenada and other countries in the region suffered from the devastating effects of hurricanes only last year. Much of the infrastructure and most of the buildings in Grenada were destroyed or damaged. Already, however, the Grenadan authorities have indicated to the OPCW that they are on the road to recovery, and are ready to meet now to discuss joining the CWC. Nearly all of Grenada's neighbours in regional groupings such as CARICOM and the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) have already done so. There is now no credible reason for any country in this region to stay outside the Convention.

In addition, only two OAS members – Antigua and Barbuda, and Barbados – have not signed the Convention. In the whole United Nations, there remain 10 non-signatory States. Other non-signatories – including Angola, Iraq, and Vanuatu – have indicated their intentions to accede, in some cases within a matter of months. The other five non-signatories are Egypt, Lebanon, North Korea, Somalia, and Syria.

The resources of the OPCW, and of many of its 167 Member States, are also being offered to States Parties, to assist them in meeting the timelines for implementation, including by providing drafting assistance, to meet the November 2005 target to have all necessary legislative and administrative measures in place.

A spin-off benefit of such assistance is that, by complying with the Chemical Weapons Convention, States are also able to report compliance with other international obligations, including under applicable Security Council Resolutions such as Resolution 1540, which applies to all UN members and not only to States Parties to the CWC. Recently, a series of legislative implementation-related assistance visits were carried out in several Caribbean countries, including Dominica, Saint Lucia, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago.

I am proud to report that the OPCW has now verified, with the help of our international inspectors from nearly 60 countries, the destruction of over 11,500 tons of chemical agents, more than 15% of the declared total, and over 2.1 million – or nearly one-quarter – of the declared munitions and containers, as well as the destruction or conversion of three-quarters of the declared chemical weapons production facilities.

Verification of destruction of chemical weapons and associated facilities is not all that we do. To ensure non-proliferation of chemical weapons, we also conduct industry inspections, with a full programme of inspections already underway for 2005. To date, more than 2000 inspections of chemical weapons and industry-related facilities have been carried out at more than 800 individual sites in all regions of the world.

The Convention also creates a mechanism through which assistance can be provided to Member States in the case of use or threat of use of chemical weapons against them. Protective capacity against chemical weapons is not readily available in many countries. Membership of the Organisation enables States Parties to receive

assistance and training, which is not only highly specialised, but also reinforces many common elements with emergency response and preparedness programmes that every country needs ...

In addition, the Convention encourages international co-operation and the exchange of scientific and technical information for peaceful purposes, including through training of chemists and chemical engineers under the OPCW Associate Programme, and funding of research projects, scientific internships, and equipment exchanges. We also organise regional meetings for National Authorities and other thematic and national courses and workshops to support global and regional implementation efforts.

A national workshop on industry-related declarations under Article VI of the Convention was carried out in Mexico in March 2005. During next week, the Sixth Regional Meeting of National Authorities in Latin America and the Caribbean will take place in Bogotá, Colombia, from 21-22 April.

Later this year, a sub-regional meeting of National Authorities in Central America will be held in Guatemala from 19-20 July, followed by a thematic workshop on the training of escorts for inspections and a trial industry inspection is scheduled to take place in Cuba from 2-3 August. In the last quarter of 2005, we are also planning to conduct a sub-regional meeting in Jamaica on the implementation of the CWC for Caribbean countries, with emphasis on import/export controls.

All these activities underscore the intensity of the OPCW's commitment to the region, including with the OAS, as well as CARICOM, the OECS, and the Andean Community. I am confident that this will further intensify in our interactions in the future, as we jointly strive for our shared goal of a chemical-weapons-free region, fully consistent with the CWC and with OAS General Assembly Resolution 2000.