60th Pugwash Conference on Science and World Affairs

Distinguished colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to address you here this evening.

1. The Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs have been constructively contributing to global security issues for well over half a century.

2. I take this opportunity to acknowledge the more than thirty workshops convened by the Pugwash Study Group on the Implementation of the Chemical and Biological Weapons Conventions since 1993. These workshops have made a valuable contribution to upholding both Conventions, engaging, as they have, a wide range of stakeholders from government, industry and civil society.

3. I should also note that it is a special pleasure to be hosted by a Nobel Peace Prize laureate in the wake of the decision of the Nobel Committee to bestow this year's prize on the OPCW. I hope that all of us in the disarmament community can draw inspiration from this award in advancing the cause of international peace and security.

4. This sort of acknowledgement gives us an opportunity to consider what we have accomplished over the sixteen-year history of chemical disarmament, as well as where we may have fallen short, and to draw lessons from this for the challenges ahead.

5. This evening, I propose therefore to outline – very briefly – some of these accomplishments, the challenges and opportunities presented by our mission in Syria and, finally, to address new and emerging areas of focus for the OPCW of the future.

Current state of chemical disarmament

6. As you are aware, with the recent accession of Syria, and that of Somalia in June, membership of the CWC now stands at 190 States Parties. This makes the CWC the fastest-growing disarmament treaty in history.

7. Since the entry into force of the Convention in 1997, OPCW inspectors have conducted more than 2,000 inspections in 86 States Parties at many of the 5,000 facilities of interest for implementation of the Convention.

8. Industry inspections, which have seen a steady increase over recent years, will ensure the ongoing credibility of the CWC as an effective barrier to proliferation.

9. Our close watch on the developments in the field of science and technology and the engagement of scientific communities in this context is, as I shall describe more

fully, a cornerstone of the success of the OCPW, and will play an import role in guarding against the re-emergence of chemical weapons in the future.

10. At the same time, the OPCW has provided extensive support to States Parties through International Cooperation and Assistance programmes to help strengthen national-level implementation and assistance and protection measures against chemical attacks. These endeavours have also led to more broad-ranging collaboration, identifying opportunities for peaceful uses of chemistry that bring humanitarian, development and economic benefits to States Parties with economies in transition.

11. On the disarmament front, reinforcing the unique status of the CWC as the only multilateral treaty banning an entire class of weapons of mass destruction under strict international verification, the OPCW has verified the destruction of some 58,170 metric tonnes, or nearly 82%, of all chemical weapons stocks declared by seven States Parties – before the accession of Syria as the eighth possessor State. Of 70 declared production facilities, almost 93% have been destroyed or converted. We also work to eliminate old and abandoned chemical weapons.

12. The two major possessor States, the Russian Federation and the United States of America, are well on track to achieving their destruction targets, as revised by a Conference decision in 2011. Three other possessor States have successfully completed destruction of their stockpiles and other remaining possessor States are moving quickly to complete destruction. We are hopeful that the remaining Libyan stocks will be eliminated by early 2015, and Iraq is proceeding with a plan to destroy remnants of chemical weapons on its territory.

    And work is now under way in Syria.

Mission in Syria

13. The Joint OPCW-UN Mission in Syria, established on 16 October, presents a unique opportunity to rid the world of a major chemical arsenal and make a lasting contribution to regional and global security. At the same time, it faces unprecedented challenges. Never in the sixteen-year history of the OPCW have we been called on to verify a destruction programme amid a civil war, within such compressed timeframes.

14. But the OPCW is rising to this challenge. We are bringing all our efforts to bear on meeting the ambitious timeframe of mid-2014 for the complete destruction of the Syrian chemical weapons, as set out in the OPCW Executive Council decision of 27 September and reinforced by UN Security Council resolution 2118 adopted that same day. Our progress to date, together with the constructive cooperation we have received from Syrian officials, only serves to reinforce our confidence.

15. Since an advance OPCW team first arrived in Damascus on 30 September, only three days after the historic decision by the Executive Council, we have seen a high tempo of activity towards meeting milestones set out in the accelerated programme. Working closely with our experts, Syrian authorities provided additional information

on 4 October to supplement their initial disclosure about the Syrian chemical weapons programme. On 27 October, they submitted an initial declaration, as required by the Convention.

16. OPCW inspectors have so far inspected 21 of 23 disclosed sites and verified 39 of the 41 facilities at those sites. The Syrian Government has declared the two remaining sites as abandoned, due to the ongoing conflict. Contents of those sites shifted to other declared locations have been verified. We are nonetheless working with the UN to negotiate safe access to the remaining sites for our inspectors to visit. Our approach is that all parties to the conflict must be stakeholders in this mission and work towards its achievement. There can be no doubt in anyone's mind that removing chemical weapons from a country where they have been used can only yield obvious humanitarian and security benefits.

17. The first major task of rendering all chemical weapons production, mixing and filling facilities inoperable – in other words, achieving their functional destruction – was completed ahead of the 1 November target date set by the Executive Council.

18. The next major challenge will be for the Executive Council to set intermediate deadlines and take forward planning for destruction. Work has already been commenced in The Hague to achieve this goal as soon as possible, with a meeting of the Executive Council scheduled for 15 November. Syrian officials will participate in these discussions. For your information, the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic presented his credentials the day before yesterday, and a liaison office has been opened in The Hague.

19. On a related note, it is worth noting that the work of the OCPW in Syria has not been limited to the Joint OPCW-UN Mission. As you are aware, we have also provided assistance to the United Nations Mission to Investigate Allegations of the Use of Chemical Weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic.

20. While this mission is separate from the Joint OPCW-UN Mission, the fact that it confirmed the use of chemical weapons in the Damascus suburb of Ghouta on 21 August clearly adds urgency to our endeavours to remove chemical weapons from Syria and achieve a complete demilitarisation of Syrian chemical weapons.

21. Notwithstanding the progress we are making, we should be under no illusions about the challenges ahead. The efforts of the OPCW – within its technical mandate – will not end the conflict. But it is important to remember that our mission was born of a unique moment of consensus on the Syrian crisis. The diplomatic push that got the Syrian chemical disarmament under way is far from expended – it offers the best hope for obtaining agreement from all parties on a political resolution. Wherever efforts to achieve such a resolution lead, the OPCW will devote all of its energy and resources to ensuring that chemical weapons are not part of the future of Syria.

Emerging and future challenges

22. Among emerging and future challenges for the OPCW, one flows directly from the accession of Syria to the CWC – and from the graphic reminder of the horrific and indiscriminate impact of chemical weapons that the attacks in Ghouta gave us.

23. With only six states now outside the CWC, the OPCW is determined to hasten the vision of full universality of the Convention to reality. We are redoubling our efforts, in cooperation with States Parties and international organisations, to secure the earliest possible accession by those states.

24. The accession of Egypt and Israel accession to the CWC would send a powerful signal. It would multiply the security benefits accruing from the elimination of Syrian chemical weapons. And it would help build confidence and increase transparency across the region through a non-discriminatory international norm that extends the same rights and obligation to all of its States Parties under international verification.

25. Further afield, with the prospect of the complete destruction of declared chemical weapons stocks looming ever nearer, we must turn our attention to closing any opportunities for chemical weapons to re-emerge in the future, and also prevent toxic chemicals and chemical weapons falling into the hands of non-State actors.

26. To do this, we need to ensure that the key pillar of the CWC – its verification regime – remains flexible and responsive enough to monitor and assess changes in the nature of armed conflict, structural and technological changes in the chemical industry and, above all, advances in science and technology that could challenge traditional understandings of what constitutes a chemical weapon.

27. The OPCW Scientific Advisory Board and its temporary working groups play a key role in this respect. They provide independent advice that helps us recognise beneficial new technologies and understand changes in scientific and industrial practices, and they alert us to challenge areas that may require us to review policies to ensure we remain future-focused. Indeed, a key recommendation of the Third Review Conference on the operation of the Convnetion, held in April, reaffirmed the need to stay abreast of developments in science and technology.

28. Our ability to do this effectively and efficiently will depend first and foremost on ensuring we have as broad and engaged a community of stakeholders as possible. We need to ensure that scientists in both academia and industry, in addition to government officials and policy-makers, are well positioned to identify quickly how scientific and technological advances can not only bring about benefits, but can also cause harm, if misused.

29. For this, we will need to engage our scientists in a more responsive ‘early warning’ capacity. Advances in the life sciences and the convergence of biology and chemistry with all other scientific disciplines are areas of particular relevance in this respect.

30. Finally, securing the gains of chemical disarmament for future generations will require closer collaboration with civil society and the chemical industry, something in which Pugwash has been a pioneer for many years.

31. Through our public diplomacy and outreach programmes, the OPCW is striving to involve a much wider range of stakeholders in the effective implementation of the CWC.

Conclusion

32. If the challenges ahead for chemical disarmament tell us one thing, it is this: the success we have enjoyed to date cannot be taken for granted. In an ever-changing, increasingly globalised world, we must ensure that our implementation and compliance mechanisms remain effective.

33. Even after we have achieved a world free of chemical weapons, the OPCW will need to continue to adapt its verification regime to safeguard against the re-emergence of such weapons. This regime will remain the measure of our success well into the future.

34. As Joseph Rotblat said in Oslo in 1995 upon accepting the Nobel Peace Prize, alongside Pugwash: "At a time when science plays such a powerful role in the life of society, when the destiny of the whole of mankind may hinge on the results of scientific research, it is incumbent on all scientists to be fully conscious of that role, and conduct themselves accordingly."

35. It is precisely this principle which the OPCW has sought to apply in its efforts to create networks of stakeholders that include not only scientists and researchers, but also industry, to inform our verification activities in the most practical and effective way possible.

36. Proactive engagement by scientists will be vital for underwriting our ability to maintain the integrity and durability of the CWC and its verification regime into the future.

37. With these remarks, I take this opportunity, at the 60th Pugwash Conference, to commend the founders of Pugwash on their vision and the current leadership on their implementation of that vision – a vision that the OPCW shares and is committed to applying in our ongoing work.

Thank you for your attention.