Tenth Annual NATO Conference on
WMD Arms Control, Disarmament and Non-Proliferation

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Deputy Secretary-General Vershbow,
Ambassador Benno Laggner,
Assistant Secretary-General Ducaru,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to address the Tenth Annual NATO Conference on WMD Arms Control, Disarmament and Non-Proliferation here in Interlaken, albeit in different circumstances to those originally intended.

I take this opportunity to thank our Swiss hosts for making this important event possible, as well as for their valuable contributions to advancing the rule of law in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation.

Over the decade that it has been convened, the NATO WMD Conference has set itself apart with its practical focus.

I do not intend to depart from this tradition in my remarks here today.

Because the history of chemical disarmament has been nothing but one of practical, outcomes-focused activity.

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As experts in disarmament and non-proliferation, all of you are well aware of the fact that chemical weapons are being eliminated at a rapid rate.

To date, some 82% of all declared stockpiles have been verified as destroyed by the OPCW. And efforts underway to eliminate remaining stockpiles are bringing a chemical weapons-free world well within our grasp.

Of the eight possessor States Party to the Chemical Weapons Convention, Russia and the United States are on track for meeting revised destruction targets.

Albania, India and another State Party, which has requested anonymity, have long destroyed their stockpiles. Libya and Iraq are working to destroy small quantities of component chemicals and chemical weapon remnants, respectively. We are watching closely the situation regarding the chemical weapons site at Al-Muthanna in Iraq.

And work is underway in Syria to remove and destroy that country's chemical arsenal.

The accession of Syria to the Chemical Weapons Convention, as its newest member last October, has provided a unique opportunity to rid the world of one of the major remaining chemical weapons arsenals – an opportunity to which we have responded quickly.

While overseeing destruction of chemical weapons is routine business for the OPCW, there is clearly nothing routine about the circumstances in which we are doing so in relation to Syria's chemical weapons programme.

The mission in Syria is the first time the OPCW has ever worked with the international community to remove chemical weapons from a country at war and in such highly compressed timeframes.

But this experience is unique not only in the history of chemical disarmament. It is the first time that a major WMD arsenal of any sort has been subjected to complete and irreversible destruction during an active conflict.

In working towards this objective, the integrity of the Syria mission has depended on the unique provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention, or CWC.

The ready-made, tried-and-tested regime which the CWC represents has meant that, with Syria's accession to the CWC, the OPCW Executive Council was able to agree and implement an accelerated destruction programme in very short order, backed up by immediate deployment of inspectors to Syria.

In fact, the first team of OPW inspectors was on the ground in Damascus less than four days after the 27 September 2013 decisions by the Executive Council and the UN Security Council.

Accordingly, the comprehensive provisions of the CWC meant that there was no need for establishing an ad hoc arrangement to undertake this task. The OPCW was ready to go, backed by the extensive provisions of the CWC, and well-drilled by extensive contingency planning.

And our ability to deploy to the field quickly, in sometimes dangerous circumstances, obtained invaluable logistics and security support from the United Nations under the auspices of the OPCW-UN Joint Mission.

While much attention has focused on slipped timeframes for moving chemicals, we should not lose sight of the achievements we have recorded to date.

These include the verified destruction of Syria's production capability and unfilled chemical munitions by target dates in November and December 2013, respectively.

This means that, since that time, Syria has not been able to manufacture any chemical weapons.

And everything has long been in place for transloading and destruction operations to get underway. These will commence as soon as the last consignment of chemicals leaves Syria – some 100 metric tonnes, or nearly 8 percent of Syria's declared stockpile.

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Given the unprecedented challenges of chemical demilitarisation in a conflict situation, the Syria mission has been no textbook exercise. And because of this, we need to draw lessons from it in planning for future contingencies, as well as for currently unforeseeable disarmament opportunities.

Specifically, the Syria mission has broken new ground in four areas, with implications for how we might undertake disarmament and verification in the future. These relate to:

- effective coordination of international assistance;
- design of innovative technical solutions for verification and destruction;

- productive engagement of the private sector; and
- new experience in relation to ensuring the safety and security of our personnel.

First and foremost, the effectiveness of the Syria mission has been underwritten by financial and in-kind assistance from over 30 countries, as well as sufficiently flexible and responsive operational arrangements to coordinate it. Removing and destroying Syria's chemical weapons is a highly complex operation, relying on many interlocking parts.

The United States provided the majority of the trucks, heavy-lifting equipment, containers and packing materials required for safely loading and transporting Syrian chemicals to the port of Latakia, with Belarus, China and Russia furnishing additional support. Transportation of the chemicals within Syria has been the responsibility of the Syrian Government.

Denmark and Norway have each provided a cargo vessel and, along with Russia, China and the United Kingdom, naval escorts for the onwards transportation of chemicals from Latakia. Finland is providing a team of chemical response experts to handle any possible chemical incidents.

The Norwegian ship *Taiko* has already left the area of operation and has already off-loaded chemicals in Finland and is now heading for the United States. In both countries the chemicals will be disposed of at commercial facilities.

Once fully loaded, the Danish cargo ship *Ark Futura* will transport mustard agent and other priority chemicals to the Italian port of Gioia Tauro for trans-loading to a US vessel, the *Cape Ray*, for destruction by a process of neutralization. The resulting effluent will be stored on board the *Cape Ray*

before being transported to Germany and Finland for disposal. The *Ark Futura* will also transport other material to the United Kingdom for destruction.

As can be seen, all of these elements combine to make for an extraordinary collective effort, in which every component part relies on another in order to ensure success.

The second challenge we faced was how to verifiably eliminate Syria's production capability within the timelines demanded, and how and where to conduct destruction of the chemicals themselves. This called for considerable flexibility and innovation on the part of the OPCW and involved Member States, in addition to the cooperation of Syrian authorities.

Verifying destruction in these circumstances has called for new approaches, particularly in cases where security considerations have prevented our inspectors from gaining physical access to facilities. In such cases, they have made use of "remote verification" methodologies through GPS-enabled cameras.

On the destruction front, the US proposal to mount two of its field deployable hydrolysis systems on the *Cape Ray* was a remarkable innovation.

In response to a third major challenge, the OPCW came up with a creative solution for dealing with the industrial chemicals used in Syria's chemical weapons programme by putting their disposal out to commercial tender. At the end of the solicitation process, two commercial companies were awarded contracts to undertake this task.

At the same time, the OPCW, in cooperation with the National Authorities of each country involved, has had to develop innovative verification measures for both the facilities and for the ports at which the chemicals will be unloaded.

Finally, before the Syria mission, the OPCW has not generally had to contend with personal safety and security factors beyond dealing with hazardous materials. In recent years, OPCW inspectors had been deployed in less benign environments, such as Iraq and Libya, but neither of these situations compares to the full-scale conflict raging in Syria.

Close cooperation with the UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS), facilitated by our Joint Mission arrangements with the UN in Syria, has been crucial in this respect. UNDSS experts conduct security risk assessments prior to site visits by OPCW inspection teams, and they accompany the teams in the field to provide security advice.

Last month's incident involving personnel from the OPCW fact-finding mission investigating alleged chlorine gas attacks served as a reminder of just how dangerous the circumstances for our inspectors can be.

I note here that the fact-finding mission recently presented its preliminary report, which I have shared with Member States. Information available to the team lends credence to the view that toxic chemicals, such as chlorine, have been systematically used in Syria.

Such attacks fly in the face of legal and moral norms, and must be condemned without reservation.

How we draw all these lessons together will be vital for future disarmament and non-proliferation endeavours.

Whatever the likelihood of scenarios similar to that of Syria occurring in the future, we must be guided by the fact that no-one had been able to predict the possibility of the current mission this time last year. Accordingly, we must be ready to react when opportunities arise, and when circumstances demand.

The Syria mission has amply demonstrated a high level of readiness on the part of the OPCW, as well as the resilience of the CWC in addressing this sort of challenge.

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All that said, elimination of chemical weapons is about more than destruction of stockpiles. Effective and durable elimination must prevent re-emergence, which is a far more complex challenge, especially in our globalised digital age.

As I have shown here, Syria has tested us in this regard, to the point where we have devised some new ways of transacting our core business. I am confident that the mission, and any follow-up, will prove, and reinforce, the resilience of the CWC.

But, as focused as the OPCW currently is on the Syria mission, we have not lost sight of strategic challenges further ahead.

A key priority is achieving full universality of the CWC by persuading the six countries still outside the CWC – Angola, Egypt, Israel, Myanmar, North Korea and South Sudan – to join without delay or preconditions.

There can be no strategic justification today for not joining the Chemical Weapons Convention – and certainly no moral rationale, especially in the wake of chemical weapons use in Syria and the strong international reaction that followed.

Clearly, also, the full success of the CWC will depend on its reach.

At the same time, many States Parties still need to make more of an effort to ensure their full implementation of the Convention, whether in relation to national legislation, enforcement or reporting obligations.

This is the bedrock of the CWC's effectiveness – namely, ensuring that every link in the international non-proliferation chain is strong.

The OPCW stands ready to assist in this regard through a range of technical assistance programmes for Member States. These include legal drafting assistance and a range of capacity-building activities, including for enhancing analytical capability.

We are also working to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our on-site inspection activities. To date, we have undertaken more than 2,500 inspections at relevant industrial facilities in more than 80 countries, and we are maintaining a schedule of some 240 inspections per year.

At the same time, we are deepening our dialogue with industry to devise ways of streamlining compliance obligations and potentially to cooperate on awareness-raising activities to broaden our reach. An important area of collaboration are

our efforts to roll out electronic submission of import-export declarations to enhance our access to information in real time.

We must also be imaginative in how we deal with rapid scientific and technological advances, and increasingly rapid and easy access to information.

With some 15,000 new chemicals being devised every day, we cannot, of course, hope to control every new chemical – nor should we try to. Our work must instead seek to strike as informed a balance as possible between prevention and promotion.

To this end, our partnerships with scientists are vital, especially through the OPCW Scientific Advisory Board.

Its role as an early-warning system in relation to new dual-use materials and technologies, as well as areas of convergence between biology and chemistry, helps us focus our attention and resources.

We must not only judge how scientific advances will affect implementation of the CWC. We must also be alert to opportunities they present for streamlining our monitoring and verification regime. This includes how we use information technology and new media for expanding our reach.

Finally, challenges posed by non-state actors must be addressed.

Given that current non-proliferation regimes were not designed to deal with terrorism, we must be realistic and hard-headed in charting risks. For example, for all the attention that nuclear security has been attracting, and rightly so in

light of the consequences, the likelihood of terrorists acquiring chemical weapons is much greater.

We are requiring our members to harmonise their reports under Security Council resolution 1540 with their CWC declarations, and are discussing ways to address intangible technology transfer – with our Member States as well as other international organisations.

Of course, these are challenges that all of us are in large part facing in addressing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

For this reason, it is vital that we share our experience and pool our resources.

NATO has extensive expertise of direct relevance to the OPCW, including impressive CBRN defence and response capabilities.

We stand ready to continue and deepen our productive cooperation with NATO, as we do with all stakeholders in our vital mission – whether international organizations, scientific establishments, industry or civil society.

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Let me say in conclusion that the OPCW is very aware of the fact that it is in an historically unique position at present.

We are undergoing transition to a post-destruction operational focus at a time of intense international scrutiny – and in a rapidly changing strategic environment.

As we do so, we are very conscious of the need to consolidate the impressive gains we have made in disarmament with a robust regime for preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons.

I am fully confident that our current circumstances will allow us to adapt to emerging challenges in a way that maximises our flexibility, responsiveness and ability to innovate.

Our goal is not only to realise a world free of chemical weapons, but also to make such a world permanent.

Thank you for your attention.