Speech at Kyoto University

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Director-General OPCW
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Professor Asada,
Faculty staff and students,

It is a pleasure to address you here at one of Japan's leading academic institutions.

Kyoto University faculty members and alumni have certainly made their mark in the world.

Their ranks include leading politicians, philosophers, economists and scientists – and no fewer than ten Nobel laureates.

It is small wonder that you enjoy the international reputation that you do.

Over more recent years, this noble institution has done much to advance the cause of disarmament and non-proliferation.

This relates not only to the work of such experts as Professor Asada, but also to the university's pioneering work on dual-use export controls and collaborative relationships between academia, government and industry – all of which resonates strongly with the work of the OPCW.

But I will have more to say about this later.

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Japan has been at the forefront of global disarmament efforts for more than half a century.

Its moral authority, as the victim of the only use of nuclear weapons in history, is beyond question.

The tragedy of Hiroshima and Nagasaki has cast a very long shadow over our humanity.

From those dark days in August 1945, we have been forced to confront the possibility of our complete destruction – a possibility that still hangs over our heads.

The destructive force of chemical weapons is, of course, of a different order than that of nuclear weapons.

But the lethality and sheer size of chemical arsenals at one time made them an ominous threat.

Tens of thousands of tonnes of nerve agent were stockpiled during the Cold War, of which one pinhead-sized drop can kill an adult instantly.

What chemical weapons share in common with other categories of weapons of mass destruction is their indiscriminate nature.

They kill or disfigure their victims on the battlefield, as well as in their homes.

They respect neither borders between nations, nor conventional rules of warfare.

And they have been used with brutal regularity over the past century, from the World War I battlefields of Flanders to the Iran-Iraq War over the 1980s.

More recently, we witnessed the horrifying sarin gas attack in the Damascus suburb of Ghouta in August 2013.

And we continue to hear reports alleging that chlorine is being used as a weapon in the region – reports which have been substantiated in part by an ongoing OPCW fact-finding mission.

I do not wish to suggest any equivalency between chemical and nuclear weapons – let alone in Japan, whose people suffered so painfully the horrific impact of nuclear attacks.

What I wish to address here is the international community's success in eliminating chemical weapons – success to which Japan has made, and continues to make, an important contribution.

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Efforts to ban chemical weapons are as old as chemical warfare itself – even older, in fact.

The first international legally binding instrument prohibiting the use of poisonous gases as weapons came into effect fifteen years before they were first used in World War I.

That was the Hague Convention of 1899.

To redress the horrors of widespread chemical weapons use during the First World War, the Geneva Protocol was concluded in 1925.

But, like the Hague Convention, it failed to stop states from using chemical weapons.

It was only six decades later that work on a global chemical weapons ban got underway in earnest.

After long and difficult negotiations, the Chemical Weapons Convention was finally concluded in 1992.

It entered into force in 1997 – almost a century after the first attempt to ban these terrible weapons.

The Convention was a remarkable achievement of multilateral disarmament diplomacy.

To this day, more than two decades since it was concluded, the Convention remains the only international treaty banning an entire class of weapons of mass destruction – in a non-discriminatory way and under international verification.

To implement its wide-ranging provisions and to administer the Convention's verification regime, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons was established, with headquarters based in The Hague.

Our record of success speaks for itself.

In only eighteen years, we have verified the destruction of some 87% of the world's declared chemical weapons across 98% of the world's population and territory.

We have conducted more than 2,500 inspections of industrial facilities in more than 80 countries to ensure their production is solely for peaceful purposes.

And we have extended assistance and training activities to all of our 190 Member States to help them protect their populations against the release of toxic chemicals, and reap the many benefits that chemistry can bring to improve human health, agriculture and living standards.

What all this means is that the goal of a chemical weapons-free world is not something we must leave to our children to achieve, but a goal that we will realise in coming years – within the next decade, in fact.

Looking back, several important factors contributed to our ability to negotiate such a comprehensive and successful instrument.

These included the new spirit of cooperation in the dying days of the Cold War, and the fact that chemical atrocities committed during the Iran-Iraq War focused the minds of negotiators.

These circumstances created an important foundation for the effective multilateralism that has underpinned chemical disarmament over the past eighteen years.

This foundation boils down to a very simple but often elusive commodity – political will.

I will not try to account for why the Chemical Weapons Convention was able to benefit from political will, when other multilateral disarmament challenges have not.

But what I will say is this.

Our ability to enforce the global ban against chemical weapons has relied on more than the treaty – as solid and comprehensive as it is – that supports it.

This was made abundantly clear in response to the confirmed use of chemical weapons in Syria in August 2013 and Syria's subsequent accession to the Convention.

At that stage, after well over two years of bloody conflict, the one point that the international community was able to agree on in relation to Syria was seizing the opportunity to eliminate that country's chemical arsenal.

And this was achieved, with remarkable efficiency, through an unprecedented international effort.

Less than one year after Syria became the 190th State Party to the Chemical Weapons Convention in October 2013 and the newest member of the OPCW, almost all of its 1,300 metric tonnes of declared chemical weapons had been eliminated.

Stocks of one particular chemical were destroyed in Syria, the rest – some 1,000 metric tonnes – was removed from Syrian territory for destruction last June.

By October last year, 98% of these weapons had been destroyed at sea aboard the US vessel Cape Ray, and at facilities in the United Kingdom, Finland, Germany and the United States.

And at the end of last month, the first of twelve declared chemical weapon production facilities was verified by the OPCW as destroyed, with work to destroy the remaining eleven facilities well underway.

At no point in this complex mission were removal and destruction efforts undersubscribed or under-resourced.

OPCW Member States did not fail to achieve consensus on decisions related to the elimination of Syria's chemical weapons programme.

A strong underlying political will to expedite this programme has been maintained.

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What does all this mean for Japan?

In relation to the Syria mission, Japan can take pride in having provided one of the largest financial contributions to the Syrian Trust Fund.

Without this sort of support from more than 35 countries, alongside critical in-kind assistance, this mission simply would not have been able to record the achievements that it did in such compressed timeframes and in such challenging circumstances.

Ridding the world of a major chemical arsenal during a civil war was an unprecedented exercise, which demanded ingenuity, innovation and a strong funding base.

It went to the very heart of the political will that has underwritten global chemical disarmament efforts, and the clear global consensus against these terrible weapons.

While Syria's chemical demilitarization will not end the brutal war in that country, it will reduce significantly the threat of chemical weapons – especially lethal nerve agents – from being used again.

It has also removed a major chemical arsenal from a volatile region.

This can only have a positive longer-term impact on efforts to obtain adherence to other weapons of mass destruction-related treaties throughout the Middle East.

That said, Japan's support for the Syria mission has only been a small part of a broader, multilayered engagement that Japan has enjoyed with the OPCW.

It is here that we must look as we consider the future of the global prohibition against chemical weapons.

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As we fast approach a time when stockpiles of chemical weapons are no more, we need to think carefully about how we can prevent them from ever re-emerging.

This is a more difficult, behind-the-scenes challenge than verifying destruction of existing weapons.

To do this effectively, we need to draw more imaginatively on the broadly-based regime that the Chemical Weapons Convention represents.

This regime stands on the four mutually reinforcing pillars of the Convention relating to disarmament, non-proliferation, assistance and protection, and international cooperation on peaceful uses of chemistry.

I have had many occasions to refer to this holistic regime – and for good reason: it works.

But more needs to be done to reinforce it against looming challenges that were not fully appreciated at the time when the Convention was negotiated.

While the Convention's provisions have largely stood the test of time, as evidenced by their ability to provide a framework for dealing with Syria's chemical weapons programme, we need to be alert to shifts in the strategic landscape.

These include rapid advances in science and technology, an increasingly globalised chemical industry, and the growing threat posed by non-state actors.

Japan is especially well equipped to help deal with these developments, and to convert some of these challenges into opportunities.

It hosts world-class chemical analytical facilities, extraordinary know-how, and boundless good will in relation to chemical disarmament.

These assets have come together most prominently in the productive cooperation between Japan and China on the disposal of thousands of Abandoned Chemical Weapons.

I witnessed this impressive collaboration first hand during a visit by representatives of the OPCW's Executive Council to destruction sites in China in September 2013.

Japan also has much to offer in relation to improving verification methods and technology – in large part also because of the extensive experience of Japanese industry in hosting routine OPCW inspections.

The OPCW is exploring ways of better utilizing and expanding our partnerships with science and industry to this and other ends.

Our intention is to foster a culture of closer stakeholder engagement, more proactive compliance and better public-private interactions on security and non-proliferation issues.

Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry has a strong track record in this regard, and we would hope to continue to benefit from METI's insights and experience.

We also hope to make greater inroads into universities and schools – not only to promote a message of science in the service of peace, but also to invite interaction with students and scientists to extend the reach of our education and outreach efforts.

Further afield, the OPCW has a clear mandate to help its Member States improve chemical safety and security – to prevent both accidents, as well as intentional attacks, involving toxic chemicals.

In this context, how we confront the spectre of terrorists acquiring and using chemical weapons must be a first-order priority.

Japan is no stranger to the impact that chemical weapons can have as an instrument of terror.

The deadly sarin attacks in Matsumoto and the Tokyo subway amply demonstrated that well-resourced and motivated non-state actors can kill and cause widespread panic and disarray.

Part of our response to incidents such as these must be to enhance training for first responders and emergency workers around the world in dealing with the release of toxic chemicals.

Finally, while the Chemical Weapons Convention enjoys near-universal membership, six countries still remain outside of its reach – Angola, Egypt, Israel, Myanmar, North Korea and South Sudan.

Of these, Myanmar is well on track to becoming the 191st Member State of the OPCW, having ratified the Convention in January.

Japan has played an important role in shepherding this process, including by running several training activities for Myanmar officials and experts.

Angola is progressing accession to the Convention, while South Sudan has not raised any obstacles to its own eventual accession.

Engagement with Egypt and Israel has been less promising, while North Korea has simply not engaged at all.

To make our net as wide and tight as possible, it is vital that these six countries join the Convention.

To this end, the OPCW will continue to work closely with Member States like Japan to bring about universal adherence to the global ban against chemical weapons.

At the same time, I would like to see more Japanese experts engaged by the OPCW Technical Secretariat to play a more direct role in enhancing implementation of the Convention across the globe.

I strongly encourage those of you representing relevant institutions and agencies to be mindful of such opportunities and to put forward suitably qualified candidates.

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Let me conclude by drawing your attention to an important upcoming event.

On April 21st., we will commemorate an important and solemn anniversary – the first large-scale use of chemical weapons near Ieper in Belgium.

The release of chlorine gas along a four-mile section of the Ieper front marked the beginning of chemical warfare – the beginning of a history that would only draw to a close in our own time as upholders of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

The OPCW will mark this anniversary with a meeting in Ieper on the 21st of April, at which a declaration will be issued.

This occasion will give us pause to consider the victims of chemical weapons at Ieper, elsewhere during the First World War, and all around the globe in the decades that followed.

It will also serve as an opportunity to remind ourselves of what can be achieved when we have created the will to do so.

In the case of the Chemical Weapons Convention, this is the very real prospect of a future forever free of chemical weapons.

At Ieper, and as we approach the seventieth anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, we need to be mindful of our humanity.

We need to be mindful of the risks that any, and all, weapons of mass destruction pose.

And we need to reassert our humanity by consigning such weapons to a tragic past so that we may enjoy a secure and peaceful future.

Thank you.