**"Towards a World Free of Chemical Weapons:
Disarmament for the Next Generation"**

**Lecture by Director-General at
Tsinghua University**

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Thank you, Prof. Li Bin

At the outset, I would like to express my deep condolences for the recent accident involving a passenger ship on the Yangtze River.

My thoughts, as those of my colleagues at the OPCW, are with the families of those who lost loved ones in this tragic event.

Dear Students,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a privilege to be invited to speak at this prestigious university.

Tsinghua is recognised as among the very best academic institutions in China and, indeed, the world – and rightly so.

Many of China's most eminent thinkers, scientists and leaders have walked through these halls.

Your country's leader, President Xi, is a graduate of Tsinghua.

With your university's international reputation and world-renowned alumni, it can be said that you, as students, represent the generation that will realise China's future progress.

Much has been said about China's spectacular economic rise.

China's growth has averaged at about 10 percent per year over recent decades.

Your country's emergence as a driver of the world economy speaks to the diligence and dynamism of the Chinese people.

As potential leaders of China's future, you live at a time in your country's great history when anything seems possible.

Yet without peace, such spectacular economic gains, as witnessed in China and the region, would not be possible.

Absent peace, progress towards economic and social development would be unthinkable.

Absent peace, advances in business, science and technology could not even be imagined.

For peace – above all else – represents the very bedrock of our well-being, and of our prosperity.

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A critical factor in the building of peace is disarmament.

By taking small steps to remove arms from conflict, we make great strides towards reducing the scale of violence in conflicts or war.

Over the last century, few weapons have caused greater fear or roused global condemnation more than chemical weapons.

These weapons have claimed countless lives over the long history of their use.

Such weapons contravene the conventional rules of warfare and pay no heed to borders among nations.

Nor do they discriminate between soldiers and civilians.

Today I will touch upon the nightmarish history of these weapons.

I will also detail – in concrete terms – what the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, or OPCW, is doing to eliminate the possibility of their being developed or used ever again.

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One hundred years have past since the first large-scale use of chemical weapons amid the trenches of World War I.

On 22 April 1915, during a battle near the town of Ieper in Belgium, 5,000 soldiers were killed by chlorine gas released along a front by the German Army.

A further 10,000 soldiers were grievously injured by the chemical attack.

By the end of World War I, nearly one million soldiers would bear permanent scars from chemical weapons, such as chronic respiratory ailments, and even blindness. The lives of nearly 100,000 soldiers would be taken by such weapons.

The onset of chemical warfare would bear devastating consequences that would span continents and affect generations.

Here in China, these weapons have left a legacy that continues to be felt today those which were abandoned by Japanese forces at the end of World War II.

Throughout the twentieth century, and especially over the Cold War, several countries have produced and stocked enormous amounts of chemical weapons.

These included deadly nerve agents, such as sarin, of which a single drop is enough to kill an adult in seconds.

Further still, scientific advances created deadlier chemical weapons over time.

Recognised from the outset as an inhumane weapon that kills and maims indiscriminately, chemical weapons would continue to be used regularly after World War I – often in conflicts hidden from the world's view.

Most recently, in August 2013, we witnessed the horrific attack with sarin gas in the Damascus suburb of Ghouta.

That attack in Syria killed nearly 1,500 people – mostly civilians – and served to reinforce our resolve to intensify our mission to rid the world of these barbarous weapons.

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Securing a world free of chemical weapons is an objective that advances disarmament, as well as international law in the cause of peace.

Amid the expansion of chemical arsenals and persistent use of such weapons, many viewed them as immoral, and advocated actively for their prohibition.

Efforts to ban the use of poisonous gases in warfare occurred as early as 1899 in the form of the Hague Convention.

The Hague Convention's failure to prevent the widespread use of chemical weapons during World War I later brought about the 1925 Geneva Protocol.

But it was not until some five decades later that a comprehensive global ban on the use, as well as production and possession of these weapons, was undertaken. The large-scale use of chemical weapons in the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s infused these efforts with an urgent sense of purpose.

Following nearly two decades of negotiation, the international community drew up a groundbreaking treaty, the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Entering into force in 1997, the Convention bans under international law the development, production, stockpiling, transfer and use of chemical weapons.

At the same time, the OPCW was established in The Hague as the international organisation overseeing the implementation of the Convention.

The Convention calls for a complete elimination of chemical weapons – made credible through international verification by the OPCW.

Over the past eighteen years, the OPCW has recorded an impressive array of achievements.

190 countries have joined the Convention, representing 98% of the world's territory and population.

Eight countries declared possession of chemical weapons, of which most have completely destroyed their declared stockpiles.

Iraq has finalised a destruction program for remnants of chemical weapons on its territory, and Libya has eliminated its chemical weapons – with only a modest amount of component chemicals left for destruction.

Russia and the United States – with the largest share of the world's chemical weapons stockpile – have committed to ensuring complete destruction of their programs by 2020 and 2023, respectively.

And in a remarkably short period of time, 98% of Syria's declared chemical weapons have been destroyed.

All told, 90% of all declared chemical weapons – more than 63,000 metric tonnes of chemical agent – have been verified as destroyed by the OPCW.

At current rates of destruction, all declared stocks of chemical weapons will be completely eliminated – within eight years.

By early next decade, therefore, we can expect to complete the destruction of an entire category of weapons of mass destruction.

In acknowledgment of the OPCW's endeavours, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to the Organisation in 2013 – the first time an organisation actively engaged in disarmament was recognised in such fashion.

Against the backdrop of these achievements, we can say that the Chemical Weapons Convention embodies a shared vision of the power of diplomacy over conflict.

And of the power of effective multilateralism in furthering peace and disarmament.

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So how does this system work, and what does the OPCW do to bring about a world without such weapons?

And to what, in particular, can the Chemical Weapons Convention attribute its success?

First and foremost, the Convention relies on its non-discriminatory nature.

The fact that all of its States Parties are subject to the same rights and obligations has been of paramount importance for ensuring the success of global chemical disarmament.

This applies equally to the Convention being supported by an international monitoring and inspection system, administered by the OPCW, to verify compliance.

But of equal importance is the holistic nature of the security regime that the OPCW represents.

For the Convention works to eliminate the threat of chemical weapons in whatever guise they occur.

China, as I mentioned earlier, has long lived with the legacy of large stocks of chemical weapons abandoned on its territory by Japan before 1945.

In recent years, much has been done to address this legacy through cooperative ventures by the Chinese and Japanese Governments, supported by the OPCW.

To date, approximately 50,000 items related to abandoned chemical weapons have been found at over 90 locations throughout China.

Of this total, the OPCW has to date verified the destruction of over 37,000 of these items.

In December last year, destruction commenced at the Haerbaling site, where an additional estimated 300,000 – 400,000 ACW items are buried.

Many of these weapons are heavily corroded and damaged, and the work to destroy them is complex and resource-intensive.

The safe destruction of these weapons is critical to removing risks to China's people and environment – a process which has made much progress over recent years.

For its part, the OPCW verifies destruction operations through on-site inspections, the use of monitoring equipment and review of relevant documentation.

The parties which are involved want to ensure that the momentum is maintained in the rate of destruction of these abandoned chemical weapons in a safe – and effective – manner.

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Clearly, addressing such complex challenges requires a large investment of not only financial and technical resources, but diplomatic ones also.

Nowhere has this been more in evidence over recent years than in the mission to eliminate Syria's chemical weapons programme.

In less than one year, an unprecedented international effort was able to remove and destroy Syria's chemical weapons. This was in line with a programme agreed by the OPCW's Executive Council in September 2013 – a programme that had the strong backing of the UN Security Council from the outset.

We were able to do so amid an active conflict, in often dangerous conditions for our inspectors, in very compressed time frames.

With vital support from the United Nations and contributions from a group of more than 30 States Parties, including China, the OPCW successfully dealt with an extraordinary set of tasks and complexities.

And now, since removing and destroying Syria's chemical weapons, we are making progress in destroying declared chemical weapons productions facilities in Syria.

We are also working to clarify some aspects of Syria's declaration.

And we continue to look into allegations of chlorine use. As you are probably aware, troubling new allegations have surfaced that toxic chemicals are being used as a weapon in Syria.

Our Fact-Finding Mission is collecting and analysing information relating to these allegations, and will continue to report on its findings, as it has done to date.

This includes substantiating earlier allegations of use of chlorine as a weapon in three villages in northern Syria.

A United Nations Security Council resolution 2209 in March this year (2015) has further bolstered the support of the international community for this important work.

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What I hope to show in eliciting these examples – of work on abandoned chemical weapons in China, and on elimination of Syria's chemical weapons programme – is that disarmament is a complex, multifaceted venture.

But one that renders enduring benefits for human security and prosperity.

For it engages not only diplomats and policy makers, but also scientists, industry, and civil society.

All of us, clearly, are stakeholders in a safer future.

Yet, as demanding as this work has been, and as successful as we have been in removing chemical weapons, the challenges that your generation will face will be of a different order of magnitude and complexity. The prevention of reemergence of chemical weapons will be the main focus of international efforts. While the production and use of chemical weapons by States has become less likely, Non State Actors have become a major source of concern.

Today, for example, we are seeing the threat of chemical terrorism looming ever larger.

It does not take much to imagine the impact of an attack against a large chemical facility, or the death and panic that would result from the release of nerve agent in a crowded part of a city.

We have already seen that non-state actors, past and present, have sought to acquire and use chemical weapons, or to use widely available toxic chemicals as weapons.

Twenty years ago, a Japanese cult, Aum Shinrikyo, carried out such an attack by using sarin on passengers in the Tokyo subway.

Twelve people were killed in the attack, and thousands were injured.

To counter such threats, the OPCW is working with its Member States to grow the capacity of national jurisdictions to protect against such attacks and to mitigate their impact. We are helping States Parties to build capabilities for effective emergency response.

As an active and supportive State Party, China is making significant contributions in this area.

Last month, China successfully hosted two meetings among OPCW Member States in the Asian Region.

These meetings provide valuable opportunities to strengthen measures towards implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention in the region, and further advance outreach efforts across the region.

We are also turning our minds to what might be done to better harmonise national legislation that criminalises illicit chemical activities.

Rapid advances in science and technology, together with the globalisation of chemical industry can pose further challenges in this regard.

But they can also create opportunities – opportunities for scientists and engineers to work more closely with policy-makers to ensure science always works in the cause of peace. The OPCW, under Art. XI of the Convention has a comprehensive programme to promote the peaceful use of chemistry.

China has a fast growing chemical industry which accounts for 10% of gross domestic product.

Your country has declared nearly 1300 facilities out of a total of 5000 industrial plants globally subject to international verification.

To date, the OPCW has carried out over 400 inspections in China.

Such inspections are carried out to verify that a State Party is meeting its obligations under the Convention – and that all activities taking place in a State's chemical industry remain for peaceful purposes.

These inspections have been carried out without incident in China – and we continue to count on the Chinese chemical industry as a key stakeholder in the full and effective implementation of the Convention.

And with some industry experts anticipating further growth in China's chemical industry, we may expect that some of you may be personally involved in these processes in the future.

Above all else, I want to encourage your generation to chart new directions for a more proactive disarmament.

A disarmament that anticipates new challenges in ways that can effectively prevent the re-emergence of weapons that our generation has all but eliminated.

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So let me close by exhorting you to think imaginatively about how to secure the gains we have made in chemical disarmament.

By fostering a culture of responsible science in our universities.

By engaging our scientists and industry on ways of enhancing chemical security.

By educating our public of the legacy of chemical weapons and of the need for informed vigilance.

And by ensuring that our diplomats understand the nexus between science and security as science continues to grow our prosperity and well-being.

As a powerhouse of economic and scientific progress, China will play an increasingly important role in this process – a process to which many of you, I hope, will actively contribute.

In closing, I would like to quote a Chinese poet from some centuries ago:

“Jiang Shan Dai You Ren Cai Chu, Ge Ling Feng Sao Shu Bai Nian.”

“Every generation produces its leaders to face up the tasks of their time.”

Your time is coming. I am sure you are ready to lead.

Thank you.