"Chemical Disarmament at the Crossroads:
Past Successes and Future Challenges"
Lecture to Institute for Political Studies of the
Universidade Católica Portuguesa
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Prof Espada,
Ambassador Ferraz,
Ambassador Serrano,
Distinguished faculty members,
Dear students,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be in the *cidade das sete colinas*, and an even greater pleasure to be invited to speak at one of Portugal's most prestigious universities.

I will focus my remarks today on a topic that has great relevance and currency in today's geopolitical landscape.

I suspect few, if any, in this room have a first-hand experience with the horrors of chemical weapons.

However far too many have fallen victim to a weapon of war that has the terrifying power to suffocate, to blind, to scar and to kill.

The development and use of this weapon of mass destruction predates others in this category, for indeed, people have employed chemicals as instruments of war for thousands of years.

The modern day use of chemical weapons occurred a century ago in the trenches of World War I.

On 22 April 1915, during a battle near the town of Ieper in Belgium, thousands of soldiers were killed or injured by poison gases that were released along a front by the German Army.

The scores of soldiers gravely wounded by the toxic properties of chlorine that day would be the first among tens of thousands to be killed by chemical weapons in the war.

In fact, the widespread, indiscriminate use of phosgene, sulfur mustard and other chemical warfare agents throughout the conflict lead some to term it "The Chemists' War."

Yet despite this widespread use in wartime, it is difficult today to comprehend why any rational actor would utilise chemical weapons.

Gases are challenging to direct amid unpredictable wind patterns, and the military advantage they lend is questionable at best.

They can stray from their intended target to cause harm to civilian populations, and they can cause great damage to the environment as chemical agents and munitions can remain long after a battle has been fought.

The frequency and geographic reach of their use has far eclipsed that of other WMDs over the past century.

They have been used by states at war with one another, and have been used to foment terror upon civilian populations.

Following the chemical carnage of World War I, efforts to restrain the suffering caused by chemical weapons led to the conclusion of the Geneva Protocol in 1925.

The horrific impact of chemical weapons stigmatised them almost immediately and rendered their use as taboo.

Yet although the Geneva Protocol prohibited the use of chemical and biological weapons, it did not prohibit their production, development or stockpiling.

This enabled countries to amass huge quantities of chemical weapons during the Second World War and early years of the Cold War.

These cruel weapons continued to be used in the ensuing decades, most notably by Saddam Hussein's regime during the Iran-Iraq War.

The deadly nerve agent sarin was developed and used by a doomsday cult in the subways of Tokyo in the mid-1990s.

And we have seen their tragic use emerge in Syria.

I am pleased to be with you today to discuss the OPCW's mission of eliminating these barbarous weapons and to ensure they are never used again.

This mission although not fully completed is a success story that stands out in the annals of disarmament.

It is one that has fused science with industry and diplomacy to serve a common humanistic purpose: to work to remove the possibility of chemical weapons ever being used again.

At the end of the Cold War, and as a result of protracted and difficult negotiations in Geneva, the Chemical Weapons Convention opened for signature in 1993, and entered into force only four years later.

The text of the Convention represents the most sweeping, most comprehensive disarmament and non-proliferation treaty ever concluded.

It not only bars the use of chemical weapons, but further outlaws their production, development, stockpiling, retention or transfer – all aspects that were absent from previous attempts.

The Convention puts in place an authority to monitor and verify the global chemical weapons prohibition, a unique aspect that contributes to the success of our regime.

To date, no other treaty has ever sought to verifiably ban an entire class of weapons of mass destruction.

It is a singular triumph in the history of multilateral arms control, and its successes are credible, measurable and accountable.

So what are the Convention's core elements that set it apart from similar efforts in disarmament?

Perhaps its greatest attribute is the equitable application of its requirements.

Put simply, it obliges all States Parties to follow a uniform set of provisions.

Under the Chemical Weapons Convention, there are no 'haves' or 'have nots.'

All States Parties with chemical weapons must declare and destroy them, and those without such weapons must never develop or acquire them.

To ensure commitments are kept by all States Parties, the Convention subjects all members to an international regime for verification.

As implementing body of the Convention, the OPCW verifies the destruction of chemical weapons in possessor States through inspections, and further conducts regular inspections of chemical industrial facilities to ensure such activities remain solely for peaceful purposes.

To prevent any State from not complying with its obligations, the Convention also allows for what is termed a challenge inspection.

Under this provision, any Member State may call for investigation of another Member State provided there is sound basis for such concerns.

It is these characteristics that not only make the Convention exceptional, but also make it effective.

Let me highlight some of the measurable milestones attained by the Convention.

Since the Convention came into force, eight countries have declared possession of chemical weapons.

Three of these – including Albania, India and another State Party which requested anonymity – have completed destruction of their stocks.

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

Libya has eliminated its chemical weapons, with only a small amount of component chemicals left for destruction. Iraq has finalised a program to destroy remnants of chemical weapons on its territory, which will be implemented when the security situation will allow it.

In an extraordinarily short time period, 98% of Syria's declared chemical weapons have been destroyed.

In total, over 90% of globally declared chemical weapons have been destroyed.

At current rates of destruction, all declared stocks of chemical weapons will be eradicated early in the next decade.

191 countries have signed on to the Convention, pledging to never again consider the chemical weapons option.

To verify the destruction of chemical weapons and ensure that dual-use chemicals remain in peaceful use, the OPCW has implemented more than 6,000 inspections at facilities and industrial sites in more than 80 countries.

The measure of these metrics demonstrates the potential of negotiation over confrontation, of diplomacy over conflict.

And it is what attracted the recognition of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, when it awarded the Peace Prize to the OPCW in 2013, citing its "extensive efforts to eliminate chemical weapons."

Implementation of the Convention embodies what I term effective multilateralism.

This concept requires that relevant international organisations and treaties remain robust, and that the obligations which States undertake within such regimes are verifiable.

It can be said that both aspects are present within the chemical weapons regime, and were displayed most recently in our work to eliminate the Syrian chemical weapons programme.

The tragic use of sarin in a suburb of Damascus in August 2013 killed an estimated 1,500 civilians.

The use of sarin in Ghouta demonstrated the terrifying power of chemical weapons to kill innocent civilians.

It also set off a chain of events that was unprecedented in the OPCW's history.

In less than a year after the OPCW Executive Council's decision on a destruction plan for Syria's programme, all of Syria's declared Category 1 chemical weapons were destroyed, and only a small amount of hydrogen fluoride remains to be destroyed at a facility in the United States.

It took unique technical innovation, enterprising logistical arrangements, and the contributions and assets of thirty countries to complete the Syria mission.

The mission also benefitted from vital logistical and security support from the United Nations.

Amid a brutal civil war, all of Syria's declared chemical stockpiles were removed from its territory for destruction on a United States maritime vessel and facilities in Finland, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Across these activities, the OPCW verified removal and destruction activities, and the staff of our Organisation was fully engaged in all facets of this intricate and high-stakes operation.

Our efforts as pertains to Syria are not yet complete, however.

Some facilities relevant to Syria's programme remain to be destroyed while we continue to investigate allegations of chemical weapons use on the ground.

Further, last month, the UN Security Council passed a resolution that called on the UN Secretary-General, in coordination with the OPCW Director-General, to establish a Joint Investigative Mechanism to identify the governments, individuals or groups that have sponsored or carried out attacks using chlorine or other toxic chemicals.

Combined with these most recent developments, the Syrian mission illustrates the far-reaching international consensus and condemnation against chemical weapons.

It also validates the assertion that credible gains made by implementation of the Convention are a complicated, multidimensional proposition, for the successes of the Chemical Weapons Convention stem from a significant collaborative effort among a unique set of partners.

For example, business and industry were present in the negotiations of the Convention, and the transparency afforded by the chemical industry enhances the credibility of our regime.

Industrial facilities were also used to destroy component chemicals from Syria's chemical stockpile.

Civil society has been an active partner in spreading information on several aspects of our work, from disarmament to collaboration on peaceful uses of chemistry.

Science has formed the bedrock of our work, perhaps best exemplified by the network of OPCW-designated laboratories that support our verification regime.

The active participation from these various fields and disciplines forms the crux of my message to you today.

From poverty alleviation to refugee crises, climate change to infectious disease, overcoming many of the world's most persistent challenges necessitates a broad body of knowledge to solve ever more complex problems.

As students of political science, and as you advance towards your chosen profession – whether as diplomats, policy-makers or journalists – you may wish to develop much more broadly-based knowledge than your peers in the past.

Though Portugal has not declared possession of chemical weapons and features a moderately sized chemical industry, as your country's potential next generation of leaders, you stand well positioned to contribute to a lasting and permanent chemical disarmament.

Previously, the Government of Portugal has partnered with the Brazilian Government to enhance awareness and build capacities on chemical defense in fellow Lusophone States.

Through involvement in the OPCW's international cooperation mechanisms, Portugal and its future leaders can extend such programmes to strengthen national implementation of the Convention throughout the Lusosphere.

You can also assist us in efforts to bring about universality of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

This has particular relevance with regards to Angola, which stands among the very few countries in the world yet to become a State Party to the Convention.

Portugal's next generation of leaders can help us to navigate roadblocks that hinder our ability to achieve complete chemical disarmament.

One such issue is today present in Syria and Iraq, where allegations of the use of chemical weapons by non-state actors persist.

Recent reports of the use of chemical weapons by Da'esh, or ISIS, demonstrate the dangers of chemical weapons falling into the hands of extremist individuals or groups.

I should note that many of the current efforts in non-proliferation were not fashioned in a manner that could prevent or address the threat of terrorists possessing or using weapons of mass destruction.

Rather, the talks that brought about our current ecosystem of non-proliferation norms occurred at a time when the WMD ambitions of states were foremost in the minds of negotiators.

While the Convention demonstrated great agility in the demonstrable success of the mission to destroy Syria's chemical weapons programme, we must devise new approaches to extend its reach to prevent – and respond to – acts of chemical terrorism.

Another task we face is preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons.

Whether in Baghdad, Berlin, Kabul or Lisbon, none of us are immune from this threat.

This task is made all the more complex by the dual-use nature of chemistry, for many of the chemicals that have applications in personal or industrial use can be repurposed for hostile intentions.

The earlier illustration of the widespread use of chlorine gas in World War I is testament to this fact, for the same chemical which can be used to purify water can also be used to suffocate and kill people.

How we harness the beneficial properties of such chemicals while hindering their toxic potential to harm will be the true test of our future efforts.

Such concerns underscore the importance of the OPCW's efforts to promote the peaceful use of chemistry, and further underline the need for tomorrow's leaders to be conversant in matters spanning diplomacy, science and commerce.

I invite you to play a lead role in conjuring and implementing solutions to some of these pressing problems, for with great education comes even greater responsibility.

I have, I hope, shown today that disarmament and non-proliferation are neither abstract concepts nor as mere academic notions.

Rather, they have the potential to affect tangible outcomes that remind us that peace is more than a possibility.

But achieving such aims requires the contributions of science, of diplomacy and industry, and above all, a great determination to build a world free from the barbarity of chemical weapons.

Leonardo da Vinci is quoted as saying, "It had long since come to my attention that people of accomplishment rarely sat back and let things happen to them. They went out and happened to things."

As you embark upon your respective careers, it is my hope that you can take such an active approach to fortify our efforts towards building a more peaceful world.

Thank you.