



ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

Stakeholders Forum For States Parties In Latin America And The Caribbean (Grulac) On The Adoption Of National Implementing Legislation On The Chemical Weapons Convention

Opening remarks by the Director-General of the OPCW, Ambassador Ahmet Üzümcü

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REMARKS AS DELIVERED

HE Mr. Marcos Robledo, Under Secretary of Defence,
Brigadier-General Velasquez, Head of National Authority,
Her Excellency Ambassador Infante,
Mr. Zamorano, Director of International Security,

Dear Participants,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to present the opening remarks for the Stakeholders Forum for States Parties in Latin America and the Caribbean (GRULAC) on the Adoption of National Implementing Legislation. I also would like to express my sincere appreciation to the Government of the Republic of Chile for inviting me to Santiago and hosting this event. It is an important forum, as well as a timely one.

The region of Latin America and the Caribbean has a deep history of leading the way for the international community in the field of WMD disarmament and non-proliferation. In 1963 five Latin American countries announced their intention to establish the world's first nuclear-weapon free zone that covered a populated area. The Treaty of Tlatelolco, entered into force in 1967 and has since been joined by similar nuclear-free zones in Africa, Central Asia, South East Asia, and the South Pacific.

In the area of curbing the proliferation of chemical weapons, Latin American and the Caribbean have also been at the forefront of bold initiatives. In 1991, pending the conclusion of the negotiations for the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), the countries of Argentina, Brazil, and Chile signed in Mendoza an agreement not to develop, produce or acquire chemical arms. They also expressed the intention to establish appropriate inspection mechanisms with regard to the precursors of chemical warfare agents. A copy of this document is displayed prominently in the lobby of the OPCW as a symbol of its significance to chemical disarmament.

The importance of the Convention, has long been acknowledged by the GRULAC and every country from the region is now a State Party. Its benefits as a global security measure that has substantially reduced the possibility of large-scale chemical warfare are clear. In spite of the achievements of the CWC regime, however, there is much to be done for its full and effective implementation worldwide.

While the destruction of military stockpiles approaches its completion, the need for national implementation has never been greater. In particular, the threat of toxic chemicals being used as weapons by non-state actors is no longer theoretical, but it has become a reality. Without appropriate penal legislation outlining criminal offenses related to the CWC, necessary preventive measures may not be effectively taken and there is a risk that violations may go unpunished and compliance may suffer. The challenges we continue to face emphasize the necessity of its full implementation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Convention's entry into force in 1997 was a historic moment. It was the first multilateral treaty to ban an entire class of WMDs in a non-discriminatory and verifiable manner under strict and effective international control with concrete time lines. Today, with 192 countries as States Parties to the Convention, 98% of the world's population lives under its protection. Only four countries remain outside the Convention's framework and we are engaging with them to achieve their future accession.

96% of some 72,000 tons of declared chemical warfare agents have been destroyed under the OPCW's verification. The two largest possessor states, namely the Russian Federation and the United States, are both progressing steadily towards the end goal of the complete destruction of their stockpiles. Russia is expected to complete its destruction soon and the United States by 2023. The Convention's international verification regime remains the gold standard among multilateral disarmament agreements. With nearly 3,500 industry inspections conducted thus far, the regime is a reliable tool for preventing the diversion of dual use chemicals in compliance with the Convention. Our ability to monitor and inspect destruction and chemical production activities – in an impartial and credible manner – has been vital for building confidence among Member States.

These momentous accomplishments of the CWC and the OPCW are tangible contributions to global peace and security. Indeed, the extensive disarmament efforts of the Organisation have been recognised in 2013, by the Nobel Committee. The OPCW was awarded the peace prize for its work to rid the world of chemical weapons.

Ladies and gentlemen,

With the disarmament process winding down, the OPCW is shifting its focus to the prevention of re-emergence of chemical weapons, to evaluate and respond to rapid advances in science and technology, and to counter the mounting threat of chemical terrorism. Science and technology continues to evolve with ever-increasing speed in areas that directly relate to the CWC. Chemistry and biology are converging in certain areas, blurring the lines between these fields.

Nano technology is being used in different domains. These advances in science are expected to make immense contributions to public health, food safety, pest control, and numerous other sectors. At the same time, however, there are also significant risks of potential new chemicals with weapons applications being discovered by chance or design. To provide the States Parties with the ability to review these developments, the CWC mandated the establishment of a Scientific Advisory Board, which has been meeting twice a year since 1998.

While the risks associated with scientific progress have always been a latent possibility, the dangers of chemical terrorism are all too real. We saw in the Tokyo subway in 1995 the terrifying capacity of terrorist groups to not only manufacture sophisticated chemical weapons, but also their willingness to use them. We have witnessed this again in Syria and Iraq, where the so-called Islamic State used sulfur mustard. Chemical terrorism is not just one country's problem, but it is a global one. The ease with which non-state actors can move across borders and their interest in acquiring toxic chemicals to commit atrocities means that we need to work together.

The OPCW is aware of this problem and we are acting. The Open-Ended Working Group on Terrorism and its Sub-Working Group on Non-State Actors, have provided a valuable platform for presentations by experts and fruitful deliberations among the States Parties. Effective measures to prevent and respond to the hostile use of toxic chemicals, to hold non-state actors legally accountable for their actions, have been discussed and have been considered. These groups have also been tasked with identifying opportunities for enhanced interaction and coordination with relevant international bodies. I should take this moment to recognise Ambassador Infante for her diligent work as the Chairperson of the Sub-working Group on Non State Actors. The Sub-working Group is of great importance to our understanding of this critical and emerging threat.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As the States Parties face these new challenges, the adoption of necessary national legislative and administrative measures remains pivotal as a first step to ensuring proper implementation of the CWC. It is events such as this one that strengthens the very bedrock of our Convention. During these three days participants will be given guidance on how to take forward and improve the implementation of the CWC. It will also give them an opportunity to share information and best practices on the development and adoption of legislation. They will listen to experts from the OPCW and experienced practitioners from around the region. It is our hope that this forum will lead to specific and practical roadmaps for the completion of implementing legislation in your countries.

In the region of Latin America and the Caribbean positive progress has been made in this regard. To date, 16 GRULAC States Parties have adopted comprehensive Convention legislation. All 17 States Parties that have not yet enacted or have legislation that only includes partial measures are in the process of adopting comprehensive legislation. But the final steps need to be taken, and legislation have to be finalized, adopted, and enforced.

To maintain the legislative momentum, the OPCW has extended targeted assistance to individual GRULAC countries. For instance, the OPCW provided comments on Chile's draft law and made suggestions on how it can fill in the remaining gaps in its legislative framework on the CWC. I am confident that Chile will soon take the necessary steps towards the full implementation of the CWC. As you will hear from our experts, the OPCW conducts a variety of activities and programmes designed specifically to assist the States Parties of the Latin American and Caribbean region to produce and enact comprehensive legislation and regulations to meet their commitments. Initiatives such as the Internship Programme for Legal Drafters and National Authorities, which is hosted at the OPCW headquarters in The Hague, aid the States Parties to navigate the legislative process.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons in this changing environment will not be a single-track undertaking, but will rather require action on many fronts and enhanced engagement of key stakeholder groups. This Forum is one of many important steps we have to take together to ensure that all States Parties have implementing legislation. There is still a long way to go in raising awareness among all stakeholders, building partnerships, and pushing the process of adoption of legislation forward. We will continue to provide the necessary assistance to the States Parties, but we will rely on your commitment to implement the Convention fully and effectively.

I wish you a productive meeting and continued success.
