ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

Keynote statement by Ambassador Ahmet Üzümcü

International Workshop on "Science for Development"

9 May 2018

Quy Nhon, Viet Nam

REMARKS AS DELIVERED

Professor Trần Thanh Vân, President of the Rencontres du Vietnam,
Ministers,
Excellencies,
Professors,
Distinguished participants,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is indeed a great pleasure for me to be here with you today. At the outset, I would like to thank the Governments of Viet Nam and France for co-sponsoring this conference on 'Science for Development' as well as UNESCO, CERN and Solvay Institute. The high calibre of panellists and attendees from all corners of the globe attests to the importance of the topics under discussion here.

Science has been a key vehicle for progress in all countries. Indeed, without its key insights and breakthroughs, our world would be a starkly different place – and our lives considerably shorter. As Carl Sagan succinctly observed, "advances in medicine and agriculture have saved vastly more lives than have been lost in all the wars in history.

Nevertheless, while focusing on the immense society-wide rewards that science can bring, we must not ignore its potential hazards. Science for development can only progress with the recognition that we must all be vigilant to its inherent risks for peace and security.

The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) – the international body that I lead – is playing a critical role in ensuring that chemistry is only used for peaceful purposes in the service of progress and development.

As the custodian of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), the OPCW is dedicated to eliminating all stockpiles of chemical warfare agents under strict and effective international verification.

The Convention was developed in response to the universal abhorrence against the use of chemical weapons. Unlike earlier international treaties that aimed to prohibit the use of chemicals as weapons of war, this Convention is more comprehensive. It bans completely the development, production, acquisition, stockpiling, retention, transfer and use of chemical weapons. It goes further to prohibit the use of any chemical to do harm, even if they are routinely used for peaceful purposes, such as chlorine.

Since the Convention came into force in 1997, the Organisation has made steady progress towards its primary goal of eliminating the world's chemical weapons. The Organisation has overseen the irreversible destruction of 96 percent of declared stocks. Moreover, we count 192 countries as States Parties to the CWC and members of the OPCW.

It was for these accomplishments in ridding the world of an indiscriminate and cruel weapon and contributing to global peace and security that in 2013 the OPCW was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

While chemical disarmament is the primary mission of the OPCW, this cannot be achieved without keeping abreast of the developments in science and technology. In my Nobel Lecture, I underscored that" our aim is to contribute to efforts towards fostering a culture of responsible science. This will ensure that current and future generations of scientists understand – and respect – the impact that their work can have on security".

The drafters of the Convention were aware that a balance was required between security and human progress. Accordingly, the Convention stipulates that its implementation should not hamper the economic or technological development of States Parties. Indeed, the OPCW wants to see its Member States cultivate their chemical industries and enhance their research capabilities.

This is one of the key pillars of the Convention – to bring countries together for peaceful cooperation in the name of progress and security. There is no doubt all these efforts require a close dialogue between policy makers and scientific communities.

Science is about innovation, and this is the crucial juncture where it meets development. While it is incumbent upon the OPCW to provide scientists and researchers with the greatest possible independence to explore, discover, and create, verification is still a key necessity for treaty compliance. Verification mechanisms are supported by the Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) which is composed of 25 eminent experts. They are from States Parties but act as independent experts. They follow the scientific and technological developments which are relevant to the Convention and provide me with advise. I, of course share these with the States Parties. As to the global scientific community the MOU we have concluded 2 years ago with the International Union of Pure an Applied Chemistry (IUPAC) provides us with a framework for further cooperation.

Monitoring commercial and industrial facilities and laboratories ensures that prohibited activities are not being carried out, which builds confidence among States Parties. To date, over 3500 inspections have been conducted in chemical industrial plants in eighty countries, including here in Viet Nam. The Secretariat of the OPCW works to avoid undue intrusion and inconvenience for legitimate chemical activities.

Verification is only one element of the Organisation's efforts. In order for States Parties to truly gain value from the peaceful uses of chemistry, they must have the tools and knowledge to do so. As such, the OPCW offers numerous capacity building programmes to help experts from States Parties boost their chemistry skills. There are thousands of chemists who participated in such activities which are also in line and supportive of the sustainable development goals.

The OPCW is striving to strengthen its training facilities. Recently, a project was launched to upgrade and expand the OPCW laboratory in The Hague to become a Centre for Chemistry and Technology. This will enable the Organisation to bolster capacity-building amongst the CWC States Parties by augmenting its training and research abilities, particularly in chemical analysis. It will also increase its support for OPCW designated laboratories. 22 such labs in 18 member countries have made significant contribution to the OPCW's work by analysing samples from Syria, Iraq and most recently from Salisbury in the United Kingdom. Through this analytical work science is being used to reveal the truth in regard to allegations of use of chemical weapons. These science based findings cannot be disputed.

We are also supporting States Parties to adequately protect themselves against the possible misuse or accidental use of toxic chemicals. As a result, chemical safety and security has become a key focus within our international cooperation and assistance activities. With chemical production rapidly increasing in all regions across the globe, maintaining control over toxic substances is a critical issue for the chemical industry and governments alike.

To assist in this regard, the OPCW provides training courses and regional workshops for chemistry professionals. In fact, the OPCW held one such workshop in Ho Chi Minh City last month, which was attended by representatives from laboratories, academia, and chemical industry associations from across Asia and the Pacific.

Chemical security is a vital component of guarding against the threat of chemical weapons. Even as we grow closer to eliminating the world's military stockpiles, we are confronted with the stark reality of chemical terrorism. In places such as Syria and Iraq, the use of sulphur mustard by non-state actors has been documented and confirmed.

The governments need to take the necessary measures to prevent attempts to acquire toxic chemicals or their precursors. But since chemical security affects every stage of a chemical's life cycle, including transportation, storage and distribution a broad array of different measures and mechanisms are required with the active involvement of multiple stakeholders.

If we fail to prevent chemical attacks, however, we should be prepared to respond effectively. The OPCW has formed its own emergency team consisting of experts from across the

Organisation which we have called the Rapid Response and Assistance Mission, or RRAM for short. Designed to deploy at short notice upon the request of a State Party, the RRAM can fulfil multiple roles such as detection, assisting in treating victims or decontamination. Given the unpredictability and time-sensitive nature of such missions, new technologies, particularly for chemical detection and analysis, will need to be considered.

Ladies and gentleman,

It is disheartening to see that despite the exertions of the international community and the authority of the Convention, the world is still menaced by chemical weapons. They have been used in Syria, Iraq, Malaysia and more recently in the United Kingdom. This unfortunate reality demonstrates that progress does not intrinsically guarantee peace and security. To uphold the global norm against chemical weapons a concerted effort is needed that includes governments, the scientific community, as well as industry. I am particularly impressed by the reactions of the scientific community reflected on Statements by IUPAC, the American Chemical Society and others denouncing the continued use of chemical weapons.

In 2015 the OPCW convened a pair of workshops aimed at drafting a model code of conduct for chemistry professionals. What eventually emerged from these deliberations was a set of behavioural standards that became the Hague Ethical Guidelines. These Guidelines were formulated to provide a framework for promoting debate on ethics in relation to the global norm against chemical weapons within educational institutions, research bodies, and industry.

Other organisations have taken similar steps. The European Association for Chemical and Molecular Sciences has sought to include ethics in university curricula. In addition, the American Chemical Society facilitated the drafting of a Global Chemical Code of Ethics using the Hague Guidelines as a starting point.

In 2016 the OPCW has established an Advisory Board on Education and Outreach. Its aim is to identify best practices for raising awareness among relevant stakeholders about their possible contributions to the use of chemistry for peaceful purposes. Chemistry practitioners must be fully aware of security risks associated with their work in industry, academia or research centres.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As the OPCW shifts its focus from disarmament to preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons, reinforcing the norm against their use is of critical importance. This imperative will only increase in complexity and scale as countries naturally improve their abilities to harness the power of chemistry.

The OPCW will continue to rely on the steadfast commitment of all our partners, including the scientific community, to promote and uphold the tenets and spirit of the Convention. I wish to thank the organisers for giving me this opportunity to address distinguished participants who are present here today and emphasize once again the importance we attach as the OPCW to a closer cooperation with the scientific community

I thank you for your attention.

*****