



ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

Meeting of the Board of the International Council of Chemical Associations (ICCA)

Opening Remarks by the Director-General of the OPCW, Fernando Arias

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REMARKS AS DELIVERED

President Kottman,
Council Secretary Mensink,
Distinguished Board members of the ICCA,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for inviting me here today to speak with you. It is a great honour and a privilege to address this important body which represents over 90 percent of the globe's chemical sales and the employment of over 20 million people around the world.

While this is the first time that I stand before you as Director-General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), I have long been aware of the chemical industry's staunch support for the OPCW's activities and mission.

The reasons for this solidarity are clear enough to everyone in this room. Cooperation between us is vital for the fulfilment of the promise of the Chemical Weapons Convention – “a world free of chemical weapons and the peaceful application of chemistry for all.”

That promise, however, is in danger of being undermined by current events. We must accept that the norm against the use of chemical weapons is being tested today in an unprecedented manner.

Over the past two years alone we have witnessed chlorine and sarin used against innocent civilians in Syria. Highly toxic nerve agents have found their way into an airport terminal in Kuala Lumpur and onto the streets of the United Kingdom, tragically killing two people and endangering thousands more. The threat of chemical terrorism is growing, with alleged plots involving non-state actors recently foiled in Europe. When a norm is strong, however, its violation triggers outrage and ultimately action in its defence.

We saw such a response this year. In the face of persistent chemical weapons use, a special Conference of the States Parties to the CWC was convened in June and took a decision to confer a new mandate on the Secretariat.

This mandate instructs the Secretariat to conduct investigations to attribute responsibility for chemical attacks in Syria. It also allows the Secretariat to assist States Parties who request support in investigating uses of chemical weapons on their own territory. In their decision, the States Parties also instructed the Secretariat to develop a series of proposals to strengthen a range of OPCW activities. These are to focus on verification, chemical security, responding to the threat of non-state actors, and cooperation in the peaceful uses of chemistry. I will be presenting these proposals to the meetings of the Conference of States Parties next month.

Against this backdrop, the OPCW is entering a new era. The chemical demilitarisation process is nearing the end and universal membership of the Chemical Weapons Convention by all countries in the world is within our grasp. As such, it is clear that the Organisation must shift its focus increasingly to the prevention of the re-emergence of chemical weapons as its primary mission. Success in this mission requires the dedication and commitment of all stakeholders.

The re-emergence of chemical weapons is a collective threat that can only be prevented through collective action. In this regard, I thank ICCA for its endorsement this year of The Hague Ethical Guidelines. Developed by an international group of chemistry practitioners, including from chemical industry, these guidelines can help promote a culture of responsible conduct in the chemical sciences to guard against the misuse of chemistry.

This is the most recent example of the strong cooperation that has been flourishing between the OPCW and ICCA since the establishment of our formal relationship in 2015. Through the Joint ICCA-OPCW Steering Committee and its subsidiary Chemical Industry Coordination Group our organisations have undertaken a variety of joint activities in support of the Chemical Weapons Convention. In this regard, I specifically wish to thank ICCA for providing invaluable expertise to our capacity building programmes. We greatly value the perspective that your practitioners bring to our events.

Of course, a partnership is meant to benefit both parties. I therefore want to assure you of my understanding that the chemical industry has important commercial activities to carry out and obligations to its own stakeholders. It is the objective of the OPCW to work alongside the chemical industry and not to burden its legitimate activities. Accordingly, on key issues of interest to the chemical industry, such as industry inspections, we will listen to you and work with you to make improvements that can help both industry and the OPCW's verification responsibilities.

It is my hope that through more joint efforts such as this, our cooperation will continue to expand and deepen during my tenure as Director-General of the Organisation. Indeed, we must stand together in order to reach our mutual goal of ensuring that the "... achievements in the field of chemistry should be exclusively for the benefit of mankind" as called for by the preamble of the CWC. Meetings such as this one contribute to that goal, and I therefore hope to have the opportunity to participate in these meetings in the years to come.

I thank you for your attention and I look forward to answering your questions.
