



**ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS**

**Asser Institute Ninth Annual WMD Training Programme**

**Disarmament and Non-Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction in a Changing World**

**Keynote Address**

**Director-General of the OPCW, Fernando Arias**

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*REMARKS AS DELIVERED*

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure and an honour to address the Ninth Annual Asser Institute WMD Training Programme. This is a well-known and well attended disarmament-related event, and I wish to express my gratitude to the organisers for their excellent work in arranging another interesting and valuable course.

The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons has had a long and rewarding association with the T.M.C. Asser Institute. The Institute's reputation as a centre for international law is held in high-esteem not only in Europe, but around the world. We are pleased to be once more cooperating on this exceedingly important subject of the disarmament and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

This is a topic that should resonate far beyond the traditional security stakeholders of political and military decision-makers. I should underscore that WMDs impact and concern all citizens, from all walks of life, in every country. The threat that WMDs pose to our security is of a complex and evolving nature. However, it is important that we never lose sight of the humanitarian aspect of our work.

Disarmament and non-proliferation are not simple issues that lend themselves to simple solutions. They require specialised knowledge and training in a variety of cross-cutting areas of a technical and non-technical kind. The objective of this course is to equip future policy shapers and activists, like yourselves, with a comprehensive overview of the contemporary legal, scientific, diplomatic, and political landscape of this field.

You will have the chance to hear from a broad-range of speakers from international organisations, academia, think tanks, and civil society. More importantly, you will be able to

engage with and question them on their areas of expertise. These interactions will allow you to experience different perspectives, and to prepare you as better contributors to multilateral action. Effectively grappling with WMDs, nevertheless, requires more than a full quiver of information, but also the ability for creative reasoning and the capacity to build diverse coalitions of relevant parties.

The Chemical Weapons Convention, is a singular example of how disparate groups can come together to solve a global problem. It was not easy, though. It required twenty years of intense and technical negotiations in Geneva, as well as an uncountable number of discussions in multiple capitals. It was thus an historic achievement of the Conference on Disarmament when the Convention opened for signature in Paris twenty five years ago. And only four years later entered into force.

More than two decades on, the CWC remains one of the foundation stones of international disarmament. Indeed, it is arguably the most successful treaty of its kind, banning a whole category of weapons of mass destruction under a strict and effective global verification regime. The most critical aspect of the Convention is that it has been the channel through which concrete and measurable disarmament progress has been realised.

Today, over 96 percent of all declared chemical weapon stockpiles have been irreversibly destroyed under the watchful gaze of the OPCW's inspectors. We will reach completion when the United States achieves its chemical demilitarisation process, planned to happen by 2023. When this occurs, the OPCW will have overseen the destruction of some 72,000 metric tonnes of the most lethal substances ever created by humankind.

Our ability to monitor these destruction activities and industrial production has been central to building confidence in the Convention and reinforcing trust between the States Parties. The chemical industry has been an essential partner in ensuring that verification is conducted smoothly and thoroughly. So far, more than 3,500 inspections of industrial facilities have been conducted in 82 countries since the CWC came into force.

Universality is also well within our grasp. At present, 193 countries are States Parties to the Convention – the highest level of adherence of any disarmament treaty. Only four countries have yet to become members of the CWC: Egypt, Israel, North Korea, and South Sudan. And we are making every effort to convince them to join the overwhelming majority of the world in our endeavour to permanently eradicate chemical weapons.

It is undeniable that we are safer today because of the Chemical Weapons Convention. Much of the OPCW's activities to implement its provisions have occurred out of the spotlight and off the front page of the news. But the international community did recognise the importance of our work when, in 2013, the OPCW was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for its extensive efforts to eliminate global stocks of chemical weapons.

At the same time that the OPCW has made progress in its disarmament mission, it has had to contend with the ongoing use of chemical weapons. Syria has been the biggest challenge in this regard.

After the Syrian Arab Republic joined the CWC in 2013, the OPCW worked swiftly in cooperation with the United Nations and more than 30 partner states to dismantle its declared chemical weapons programme.

However, chemical attacks have persisted in that country. In response to ongoing and credible reports of chemical weapons use, a Fact-Finding Mission was established in April 2014 to examine the allegations on the ground.

The work of the FFM, as it is commonly called, has proven to be indispensable. After intensive, thorough, and independent investigations, it has determined that chemicals were used as weapons.

Regrettably, other incidents have arisen around the world. In the past few years we have also witnessed sophisticated nerve agents employed to assassinate individuals in Malaysia and the United Kingdom, resulting in the tragic loss of life.

The use of chemical weapons should and must be condemned in the strongest possible terms. Nevertheless, statements of condemnation by themselves are not nearly enough to stem the audacious and continuing use of these inhumane weapons.

Action speaks louder than words. And the States Parties to the CWC have acted. In June this year the Conference of the States Parties adopted an important decision giving the Secretariat the mission to investigate chemical weapons use in Syria and elsewhere for the purpose of attribution.

This is a critical new power for the Organisation. Previously, we had only been able to say if chemical weapons had been used. With the new mechanism we can now carry on the mission to identify the perpetrators. Nonetheless, we are not judge and jury; that role is for other institutions to assume. Our contribution will be to attribute responsibility in an impartial, independent, and effective manner.

Setting up the mechanism demands steady and careful planning. The Secretariat has, after intensive efforts, identified the needed resources and structures to deliver on this new mission.

Attributing responsibility for violations of the Convention's basic prohibition does not just apply to states. It extends to non-state actors as well. This reflects the concern over the real threat of chemical terrorism.

In recent years, we have observed this threat grow. In Iraq and Syria, the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) was found to have used mustard gas in attacks in 2015 and 2016. As the OPCW shifts towards preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons, this issue will occupy greater prominence.

Moreover, it will require concerted global action utilising a wide spectrum of multilateral tools and legislative mechanisms. In the OPCW, we have taken a holistic approach. An Open-Ended Working Group on Terrorism has been tasked with identifying opportunities for enhancing

interaction and coordination with relevant international bodies. A Sub-Working Group was also created to identify best-practices related to tackling the problem of non-state actors specifically.

To further solidify the OPCW's endeavours in this area, in October last year the Executive Council of the Organisation adopted a landmark decision addressing the threat posed by non-state actors. States Parties have a key role in implementing the Convention through their legislation, especially by imposing penal sanctions for violations of its prohibitions.

Finding synergies with other international organisations is also important. As such, we have established a partnership with the United Nations Counter Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF). The OPCW has taken a proactive role within this initiative that includes 37 other international entities. We co-chair with the International Atomic Energy Agency a working group on preventing and responding to biological and chemical terrorist attacks.

At the same time the OPCW has developed the capabilities to aid States Parties that are dealing with chemical incidents, including acts of terrorism. In 2016, the Organisation formed the Rapid Response and Assistance Mission, which can be deployed upon request and at short notice to provide emergency measures of support in cases of chemical weapons use.

Coping with the rapid pace of discoveries in science and technology will pose a unique challenge to the Organisation in addition to offering vast opportunities. To stay ahead of the current challenges and in touch with the future ones, the OPCW relies upon its Scientific Advisory Board (SAB). Composed of 25 eminent experts from different States Parties, the Advisory Board helps the Organisation keep abreast of new developments —good and bad— that can impact the implementation of the CWC.

But the evolution of science requires us to adapt our capabilities and we are currently working on transforming our current laboratory into a Centre for Science and Technology that will allow the OPCW to remain fit for purpose.

Over the next couple of months, this very subject of the future will be at the forefront of the OPCW's collective mind, because we are preparing for the Fourth Review Conference in November. Throughout this year, our member states have been engaging in extensive consultations to prepare for the Review Conference. They know that this critical meeting should not just address the challenges we are currently facing, but also determine the priorities and plans to guide the Organisation for the next five years, and provide the Secretariat with the appropriate means and resources to address these priorities.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Twenty-one years after its entry-into-force, the CWC has reached another critical turning point. Respect for the norm against chemical weapons is under strain, and if this situation is not halted we risk the use of this armament to become normalised.

This should serve as a warning as well as a clarion call. While progress has certainly been made, it is not self-propelling and reversals can occur in the absence of vigilance. But the experience of

the CWC has also demonstrated that when agreed upon disarmament norms are tested, nations are prepared to work together in order to protect the gains achieved.

During the next few days, I encourage you approach the WMD issues under discussion from different angles and to think about them critically with a view to raising innovative ideas. For disarmament to be a success, we need leaders and innovators prepared to think outside the box in order to put weapons of mass destruction back into theirs.

I wish you a fruitful and productive week.

Thank you.

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