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OPENING STATEMENT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL TO THE FOURTH SPECIAL SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE STATES PARTIES TO REVIEW THE OPERATION OF THE CHEMICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION

Mr Chairperson,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

1. I welcome you to the Fourth Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties to Review the Operation of the Chemical Weapons Convention. My sincere congratulations to Ambassador Agustín Vásquez Gómez of El Salvador on his well-deserved election to chair this Conference. I am confident that, under his able leadership, the Fourth Review Conference will be able to achieve its objectives; I assure him of the Secretariat's full cooperation and support.
2. We have in our midst the United Nations Under Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Ms Izumi Nakamitsu. The United Nations and the OPCW are joined in the common quest for peace. Our cooperation in the pursuit of this objective is strong. The High Representative will shortly deliver a statement on behalf of the United Nations Secretary-General. I welcome her to the Conference and keenly look forward to the Secretary-General's message.
3. Over the course of this year, States Parties have invested time and effort to prepare for the Review Conference. This endeavour was ably led by Ambassador I Gusti Agung Wesaka Puja of Indonesia. I wish to convey to him my deep appreciation for his dedication and leadership as the Chairperson of the Open-Ended Working Group for the Preparation of the Fourth Review Conference.
4. The policy-making organs of the OPCW meet regularly. They consult and coordinate on matters relating to the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention. Earlier this week, the Twenty-Third Session of the Conference of the States Parties was convened.
5. Today we are presented with a different opportunity – to consider and to shape the bigger picture; to take the long view. For an Organisation that has a track record of substance, and of success in disarmament, this is no idle exercise. The international effort sustained over decades for an effective global ban on chemical weapons represents an extraordinary narrative.
6. Nearly 22 years of the operation of the Convention have witnessed the verified destruction of over 96 percent of all declared chemical weapons. Commendably, since



the previous Review Conference, the Russian Federation, as a major possessor State Party, has concluded its destruction programme. Declared stockpiles in Syria and Libya and chemical weapons remnants in Iraq have also been destroyed. International cooperation has been a vital element in these endeavours. The United States of America is on course to meet its projected completion date of 2023. Once accomplished, it will be a momentous development: for the first time in the history of the world, declared stockpiles of an entire category of weapons of mass destruction will stand eliminated under international verification.

7. Countries have joined the Convention more rapidly than any other disarmament treaty. Our membership now stands at a near universal 193 States Parties. The effectiveness of the Convention is underpinned by a system of verification, which is both unique and promotes confidence in compliance.
8. Industry verification is an almost daily occurrence somewhere in the world. Nearly 3,500 such inspections have taken place since the Convention came into force.
9. Mutual confidence also creates a constructive environment for international cooperation. The OPCW represents a model of multilateralism. Within this framework, our programmes in the area of assistance and protection, as well as international cooperation, have continually expanded.
10. One effective response to contemporary security challenges, especially international terrorism, is the establishment of the Rapid Response and Assistance Mission, which is designed to aid a State Party coping with a chemical incident involving a non-State actor.
11. On the policy side, in October 2017 the Executive Council adopted a landmark decision entitled “Addressing the Threat Posed by the Use of Chemical Weapons by Non-State Actors”, which crafts a well-defined role for the Organisation in dealing with chemical terrorism. The decision responds to growing expectations that the Organisation should contribute substantively towards preventing and responding to this threat.
12. The last Review Conference was held in 2013. In the background, the United Nations Secretary-General had initiated investigations into alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria and, in accordance with our agreement, the OPCW was assisting in those investigations.
13. Subsequent events that year proved to be defining for the Organisation. We were called upon to undertake an extraordinary demilitarisation mission in the Syrian Arab Republic. Its success is owed to the generous contributions of States Parties and the European Union, and the dedication of OPCW staff. The mission also marked a high point in our cooperation with the United Nations.
14. International cooperation was also instrumental in the success of a high-risk mission in Libya that led to the complete destruction of its remaining declared chemical weapons.
15. The Convention is, more than anything else, defined by the norms that it establishes. The work of the Organisation must continue to adapt in order to protect those norms

in diverse and challenging circumstances. The work of the Fact-Finding Mission and that of the Declaration Assessment Team are proof of such dynamism. Any use of chemical weapons is to be strongly condemned. The OPCW, on its part, has spared no effort in bringing the facts to light. Our endeavour in this Organisation has a singular purpose – to protect humanity from the scourge of chemical weapons.

16. The 2013 Nobel Peace Prize awarded to the OPCW is testament to the indispensable contribution the Organisation makes to advancing international peace and security. In this quest, we work together with a range of stakeholders. We continue to strengthen our interaction with the chemical industry, academia, scientific communities, and civil society. Our relationships with the World Customs Organization, the International Union for Pure and Applied Chemistry, and the International Council of Chemical Associations have all been reinforced. These engagements have led to more effective formal collaboration, as well as better and broader awareness-raising. The Advisory Board on Education and Outreach has done commendable work towards ensuring our connection with the broadest of communities.
17. This Review Conference aims to set a future course for the Organisation. We stand at a crucial juncture. The challenges ahead require a strong collective reaffirmation of our commitment and resolve. Eliminating the declared global stockpiles of chemical weapons is the first step in removing the threat of chemical weapons from the world. That task has not concluded, but we are close. Work will also continue as necessary to deal with old and abandoned chemical weapons.
18. It is time to turn our attention to the future; to ensure permanence to the norm against chemical weapons. This is a multifaceted undertaking. The OPCW must not only maintain but augment its capacity to tackle the full spectrum of existing and emerging challenges. The progressive strengthening of the norm against chemical weapons had seemed to make their use unthinkable. Yet, it has happened repeatedly and in the face of universal condemnation and well documented confirmations.
19. The range of activities the Secretariat is expected to perform in restoring the authority of the Convention has increased accordingly. This includes tasks and functions required by the decision adopted in June by the Conference of the States Parties at its Fourth Special Session, entitled “Addressing the Threat from Chemical Weapons Use”.
20. Chemical weapons have been used not only in the tragic civil war in Syria. We have witnessed the flagrant use of deadly nerve agents at Kuala Lumpur’s international airport and the suburban streets of the United Kingdom. Chemical weapons use by non-State actors in Iraq and in Syria is a chilling reality. The reason why the Convention and this Organisation exist is to prevent the use of chemical weapons anywhere and under any circumstances.
21. We must resolutely guard against breaches of the Convention’s norms. And we must ensure that the Organisation remains capable at all times with the tools, the skills, and the capacity to expose violations and to establish liability. Success in demilitarisation means a need to refocus energies and resources to secure abiding assurances against the re-emergence of chemical weapons.

22. Over the years, the Organisation has acquired a range of specialised skills, knowledge, and experience. Preserving these invaluable capabilities is essential, especially in view of the possibility of new States declaring chemical weapons.
23. Progress in science and technology has an inevitable impact on the Convention's verification regime. I wish to express my appreciation to the Scientific Advisory Board, which, in keeping with the OPCW tradition, has submitted a valuable report to this Review Conference. This report is the result of extensive deliberations and has used a wide range of inputs. It is my hope that it will serve as a crucial resource in the work of the Conference.
24. A recognition that the verification regime should evolve in order to remain relevant is essential for continuing confidence in compliance with treaty obligations. It is important, therefore, for the States Parties to consider adjusting the regime as new types of chemicals and new methods of production come to light. Building better verification also means grasping opportunities presented by technology to innovate treaty implementation.
25. The project to upgrade the OPCW Laboratory to a Centre for Chemistry and Technology will contribute in an important way to our scientific knowledge. It will allow us not only to keep up with technological change, but also to reinvigorate scientific cooperation.
26. A related issue is the need for monitoring developments and advances that are bringing about profound changes in the global chemical industry. To its credit, the chemical industry has remained open and engaged with the OPCW. As a matter of fact, our relationship with the global chemical industry is unprecedented in a disarmament framework. It is an excellent example of public and private partnership in the cause of peace and security.
27. The sense of ownership of States Parties in the OPCW remains one of our greatest strengths. In this regard, our international cooperation and assistance programmes play a major part.
28. Looking to the future, we aim to bring about greater efficiencies in our capacity-building programmes. We will also seek to better respond to the States Parties' requirements through tailor-made assistance. Our work to fulfil our commitments will depend in ever greater measure on deeper engagement with our partners and the broader community of stakeholders. The importance of the scientific community and the chemical industry will remain unchanged.
29. But to actively identify areas where our goals intersect with those of other international bodies is a clear necessity. Full and effective national implementation of the Convention around the world constitutes an essential measure against emerging threats, including terrorism. While the implementation of the Convention fares much better with comparable international institutions, there is considerable room for improvement. This will remain an area requiring renewed focus, in which the experience and knowledge accumulated by the OPCW in assisting States Parties in the fulfilment of their national obligations can serve as a model.

30. Other similar international goals such as the implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1540 (2004) can benefit from our endeavour. We stand ready to strengthen our cooperation in this regard.
31. There is also the need to convince the few remaining States to join the rest of the international community in becoming members of the Convention. The Conference must reiterate its position that there is no justification whatsoever in abstention.
32. Proper organisational governance will continue to characterise our work. The Secretariat consistently seeks to improve its methods in order to become even better equipped to negotiate new challenges. Appropriate amendments to the tenure policy seem due. Geographical and gender balance, biennial budget planning, and activities funded through voluntary contributions will remain under attention.

Mr Chairperson,

Distinguished delegates,

33. The OPCW has witnessed an extraordinary and productive past. There is no reason for the future to be any different. We will persevere with eliminating the remaining chemical weapons; we will continue to strengthen verification as an essential assurance of compliance.
34. We have acquired institutional experience and expertise that will help us in assisting States Parties with implementing their obligations more fully. Our capacity-building programmes will aim to provide effective deterrence against new threats, including terrorism.
35. We must also remain aware of the implications of new developments in scientific research. We have a responsibility to make the global norm against chemical weapons a permanent barrier against a form of cruelty that it has taken many generations to banish. The Chemical Weapons Convention represents an end to a dark chapter in modern warfare. All States Parties should rightly feel proud in what they have collectively achieved.
36. The Convention and the OPCW make a singular contribution to disarmament and non-proliferation. The core motivation behind this international endeavour is the promotion of civilised norms of behaviour. Without this impulse, peace and progress remain elusive. Nurturing and propagating this culture require constructive compromises. That has always been the hallmark of all your deliberations.
37. I am confident that you will bring to bear the same goodwill and spirit of cooperation on your work in the days ahead. I wish you every success.

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