



Lecture by the Director-General of the OPCW, Fernando Arias, at the Integrated Center for UN and Foreign Affairs Studies at Kwansei Gakuin University

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Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to visit Japan. Your country has been a leading proponent and supporter of global disarmament. Being the only victim of nuclear devastation, Japan's advocacy of disarmament holds high moral authority.

This commitment has also found full expression in support of the work of the OPCW. I am grateful that this strong backing has not relented as we navigate through several challenges.

These challenges have recently made the headlines and caused understandable concerns. The topic of this conversation includes the implications of the incidents in question on the global prohibition on chemical weapons.

Let us first review why the Chemical Weapons Convention, which embodies that prohibition, is so vital for global peace; how the OPCW has fared over the last 22 years in implementing it; and what lessons we can draw from this to ensure the protection and preservation of hard-earned norms.

The Convention is both a product and a necessity of our times. Ours has been described as a technical civilisation. The epithet captures the spirit of the age of science and technology. It has brought countless benefits. In many instances, the impossible has become attainable.

The frontiers of knowledge have become boundless. With this, the promise of a better quality of life for everyone appears to be within our grasp. Yet we also know that, as a global community, we cannot progress without peace. And international peace and security remains a challenge. Without these conditions, humanity cannot hope to prosper collectively.

In a world of growing complexity and rapid advancement, the strengthening of ethical and moral principles must proceed in tandem with technological advancements. To quote the French humanist and writer François Rabelais: "science without conscience is but the ruin of the soul", because there exist permanent and universal norms and values.

The seed of the Chemical Weapons Convention is humanitarian. The Convention expands on the rules that denounce excessive or indiscriminate force or make no distinction between combatants and civilians. It is the codification of such traditional rules and norms that provides the foundation for the international system and its structures of global governance.

For a helpful international environment, we thus rely on the network of international treaties supported by intergovernmental, non-governmental and regional organisations and partnerships. Efforts against weapons of mass destruction and their proliferation draw their legitimacy both from custom and the agreed recognition of the realities of our era. Our

constructive impulses and moral imperatives are thus codified into binding obligations in the shape of international treaties.

It was the dawn of the industrial age that turned the possibility of the use of poison into a threat of mass destruction. The urge for the elimination of chemical weapons grew stronger, especially after their widespread use in World War I. The first large-scale attack with chemical weapons took place at Ieper, Belgium, on 22 April 1915.

By the war's end, some 124,200 tonnes of chlorine, mustard gas and other chemical agents had been released, and more than 90,000 soldiers had suffered painful deaths due to exposure to them. Close to a million more men left battlefields blind, disfigured or with debilitating injuries.

It was not until 1997 that the evolving legal norms acquired the shape of the worldwide ban reflected in the Chemical Weapons Convention. The international community's long-standing efforts to prohibit chemical weapons comprehensively had finally become a reality.

The Convention is the first multilateral treaty that calls for the elimination of an entire class of weapons of mass destruction. It is comprehensive and non-discriminatory. It prohibits the development, production, stockpiling, transfer, retention and use of chemical weapons by States Parties, under strict international verification.

All States Parties have equal rights and obligations. Those who possess chemical weapons must destroy their stockpiles. States Parties are also required to ensure that, within their jurisdiction, chemistry is only used for peaceful purposes.

The total quantity of chemical warfare agents declared to the OPCW amounted to over 71,000 tonnes. Nearly 97% – over 68,000 metric tonnes – of these weapons have already been destroyed under verification by the OPCW. This is an historic achievement. The stockpiles of chemical weapons represent large quantities of highly lethal substances. Destroying them is dangerous, time-consuming and expensive.

All member countries with industrial chemical plants that are regarded as capable under the Convention must allow inspections by the OPCW. The purpose of these inspections is to verify that the production or consumption of relevant chemicals and precursors is only for legitimate activities.

Since its inception, the Organisation has conducted some 3,500 industry inspections to verify that the production and consumption of relevant chemicals remain confined for solely peaceful purposes. This is a crucial activity. It does not proceed from a premise of mistrust. On the contrary, it is meant to promote confidence.

A multilateral organisation is made up of States from across the world. Diversity is our strength. Amongst our membership are countries with an advanced chemical industry and those whose economies are developing or in transition.

The OPCW seeks to foster peaceful uses of chemistry. This is a major source of goodwill amongst our membership. The Convention provides for the promotion of international cooperation and the exchange of scientific and technological information in the field of

peaceful chemical activities. In this context, the Organisation has established a wide range of programmes. These include training in such areas as industrial best practices and the promotion of analytical laboratory skills.

States Parties also undertake to provide assistance to other members should chemical weapons ever be used, or threatened to be used, against them. This is an essential part of the security assurances that States receive by joining the Convention. For this mechanism to be effective, we work extensively with Member States to ensure that an adequate emergency response capacity is available at all times, should the need ever arise.

I have briefly described to you what otherwise is an extensive, highly developed and well-functioning regime. There are many facets of our work. Yet they all converge on the single objective, that of effectively implementing a global ban on chemical weapons.

The passage of time brings change. When we examine what has changed in the last 22 years, three factors impacting on our work stand out. Firstly, the near-completion of the goal of the elimination of declared stockpiles of chemical weapons. Secondly, the transformations brought about by advances in science and technology and in the chemical industry. And thirdly, the varied nature of security challenges, which of late has included the actual use of chemical weapons. Recent episodes hold lessons, both technical and political.

In the new security environment, our work and our attitudes must adapt. The approaching completion of the destruction of declared chemical weapons should not lead to disinterest and the lessening of commitment and resources. The international community cannot afford complacency.

We now need to fully focus on preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons. Recent incidents of use in Syria, Iraq, at Kuala Lumpur airport and in the United Kingdom have been a rude awakening.

The existence of an international regime itself does not guarantee security. The strength of the regime is only worth what the international community is willing to devote to it. It must be enhanced by providing it with the support necessary for it to serve as an effective barrier.

The objective of verified destruction was resource heavy but one dimensional in its construct. The objective of prevention has several facets. All need attention and the investment of financial, technical and diplomatic resources.

A key factor that influences the implementation of the Convention is science. In the context of the Convention, the horizon of science and technology presents a broad front with a number of areas. These range from advancements in pure science to routines in verification and in industry.

Chemistry, chemical technology and engineering have transformed the global chemical industry and continue to bring about major changes. New chemicals are continually being developed, together with the evolution of new techniques and methods of production. In some cases, notional boundaries between chemistry and biology have disappeared.

Yet, experience demands vigilance. We must ensure that these advances remain on a peaceful trajectory, and that science remains in the service of humanity and does not turn to its detriment. The ability, therefore, to detect the emergence of new chemicals and to establish their relevance to the Convention is vital. With only minute quantities of certain highly toxic chemicals, immense damage can be inflicted.

Advances in science and technology inevitably impact upon the Convention's verification regime. Chemistry, chemical technology and engineering have transformed the global chemical industry and continue to bring major changes.

We enjoy constructive interaction with the global chemical industry. The modern chemical industry has several layers of regulations and audits. It also has voluntary self-regulation. We understand the need to avoid additional burden for the chemical industry. Our goal remains to maintain mutual confidence. The result is a unique partnership for peace between the public and the private sectors.

The industry verification regime can benefit significantly from adjustments in the number and focus of inspections. A better-tuned, risk-based inspections regime is important, given the very large number of facilities that are declared to the OPCW.

Since trust and cooperation underpin our relationship with States Parties and the industry, our inspections can also serve other purposes. Should our hosts consider it beneficial, there can be exchanges of ideas and sharing of best practices, for example in the context of environmental standards.

If science, from the perspective of regulation, presents challenges, it also presents opportunities to invent new tools. Scientific advancements also promise improvements in effective verification and inspections. They can allow the strengthening of our capabilities to respond to chemical events. Science further provides a deterrent; as capabilities to detect and mitigate chemical threats improve, so the attractiveness of the use of these weapons declines.

The success of our work in Syria, Iraq, Libya and the United Kingdom is tied to the scientific expertise within our teams. Expertise that is further supported and strengthened by that of the OPCW's designated laboratories, through the work of the OPCW Scientific Advisory Board, and indeed the OPCW Laboratory.

The OPCW Laboratory is being upgraded. A new facility, which will become the OPCW Centre for Chemistry and Technology, is already in the process of being established. This project is being funded through voluntary contributions. The Government of Japan has made a very significant contribution to this project. I wish to thank Japan again.

The Centre represents the need of the hour. It will equip the Organisation to deal with new developments in science and technology. It will enhance our analytical capabilities. The benefits will be shared by all Member States through capacity building and opportunities for joint research in areas relevant to the Convention.

In the Salisbury incident in the United Kingdom, an extremely lethal chemical nerve agent was used. Its very existence was a matter of speculation confined to academic circles. The OPCW verification regime did not cover such substances. It is obvious that an entirely new

level of skills, training and sophisticated equipment is needed to deal effectively with such new threats.

States Parties have taken full measure of these products. Later this year, the OPCW Conference of the States Parties will meet to consider the inclusion of additional families of chemicals into Schedule 1, a list containing the most dangerous chemicals subject to verification under the Convention.

In the area of abandoned chemical weapons (or ACWs), let me just highlight the commitment made by Japan to fulfil, in cooperation with China, its obligations under the Convention, and the outstanding level of cooperation between the two countries since then.

The first contacts between Japan and China on ACWs date from the early 1990s. Mutual cooperation between the two governments on this issue has strengthened considerably over the years through frequent consultations and collaborative efforts aimed at excavating, recovering and safely destroying the ACWs with due regard for the public and for environmental protection.

Moving on to steps that will strengthen the legal aspects of the Convention regime, the priority lies in national implementation. Effective domestic enforcement of the Convention means the criminalisation of the development, production, stockpiling and transfer of chemical weapons or the use of toxic chemicals as weapons by all natural or legal persons under the jurisdiction of individual States Parties.

Few other countries have experienced chemical terrorism the way Japan has at the hands of the Aum Shinrikyo. Japan fully appreciates the importance of full and effective implementation of the Convention under domestic laws. We need to make this awareness truly global. All of our Member States must enact and enforce appropriate legislation and exercise greater controls over substances of concern. This is the best prescription to prevent acts of chemical terrorism.

We assist our States Parties in this important area through training programmes, information-sharing and capacity-building activities. These are designed to promote best practices in legal processes and enforcement. I am referring to the role of the police and judges, and the customs authorities.

The Organisation itself has progressively clarified and crafted its role in the context of global anti-terrorism. In October 2017, the OPCW's Executive Council adopted a decision entitled "Addressing the Threat Posed by the Use of Chemical Weapons by Non-State Actors".

We seek to broaden our ongoing cooperation with such entities as the UN Security Council's 1540 Committee and the UN Office of Counter Terrorism. Activities of the Organisation in this important area are guided by the work of the OPCW's Open-ended Working Group on Terrorism. The establishment of a Rapid Response and Assistance Mission (RRAM) of the OPCW, to assist States Parties that are victims of an attack, is a concrete manifestation of the substantive steps that have been taken for the benefit of our States Parties.

This brings me to the third factor relating to strengthening the authority of the Convention. Empowering the Organisation in these dynamic times is critical. So is the need for support from States Parties: diplomatic, political and financial.

When the OPCW embarked on the mission to eliminate Syria's chemical weapons programme in September 2013, the technical, logistical and security obstacles were enormous. Within a year and a half, however, some 1,300 tonnes of chemical weapons had been accounted for, removed from Syrian territory, and destroyed. Collective resolve and cooperation made this possible.

The removal and destruction of Syria's chemical weapons did not conclude our work in that country. A Fact-Finding Mission was established in April 2014 to look into persistent and credible allegations of the use of chlorine as a chemical weapon in Syria. In the face of the heavy odds, the FFM has examined a significant number of incidents. It has established that, in several of those cases, toxic chemicals and chemical weapons were used.

When faced with such breaches of international rules, the international community must act. In August 2015, the UN Security Council established the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM). The purpose of this mechanism was to attribute responsibility. The JIM assigned the responsibility for the use of chemical weapons at the level of the State and, specifically, at the terrorist group that calls itself the Islamic State. It is unfortunate that, since then, divergence more than convergence has hampered progress. As a result of veto in the United Nations Security Council, the JIM's mandate was not renewed after November 2017.

Furthermore, attacks at Kuala Lumpur airport and in Salisbury in the United Kingdom represent a disturbing reality of chemical weapons in our contemporary world. Not surprisingly, the attention has focused on the OPCW. This is the only international mechanism that can legitimately tackle the problem of chemical weapons in all its manifestations.

In June last year, the Conference of the 193 States Parties of the OPCW adopted a decision that tasked the OPCW Secretariat with the mission to investigate and identify perpetrators of use of chemical weapons on the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic. The decision also enables the Secretariat to assist, upon request, States Parties in their domestic investigations into the use of chemical weapons should this happen on their own territories. An Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) has now been established and has commenced its activities.

There should now be no doubts about the future relevance of the work of the OPCW. Heightened expectations must be accompanied with provisions to meet them. The Organisation has never operated with large budgetary outlays. We have delivered on some of the most daunting tasks with limited resources. Having proved that point time and again, it is now necessary to provide the Organisation with the resources that it needs to deal with new and emerging challenges.

The Convention remains the only international treaty of its kind. International verification provides the tools so that the international community is assured of compliance. Over the last 22 years, the regime has developed; expertise has been nurtured, and the Organisation has

become a repository of unique knowledge and skills that cannot be found elsewhere. We now need to preserve and develop this rich resource.

That is the essence of multilateralism.

In the case of chemical disarmament, our past success in destroying stockpiles of chemical weapons will be different from our future success in preventing the re-emergence of such weapons.

Starting with our mission in Syria and with other incidents that I have mentioned, a stark new reality was staring us in the face: a strong and effective OPCW is not only desirable, it is a necessity.

The highest recognition of the role of the OPCW in the context of international peace and security is the 2013 Nobel Peace Prize.

Peace and security can never be taken for granted. We must continue to work for those goals consciously, collectively and in unity.

Thank you for your attention.
