

**Statement by H.E. Ambassador Shujjat Ali Rathore,
Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the OPCW
at the 24th Conference of the States Parties of the OPCW
(25-29 November 2019)**

Mr. Chairman

Allow me to begin by welcoming you as the Chairperson of the 24th Session of the Conference of the States Parties. I am confident that with your known diplomatic skills and experience, the Conference will be guided to a successful conclusion. I assure you of my delegation's full support and cooperation.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement made by the distinguished Representative of the Republic of Azerbaijan on behalf of the States Parties belonging to the Non-Aligned Movement and China.

I would like to thank the Director General for his opening statement. His report on various activities of the Secretariat reflects on the substance of our work in a comprehensive manner.

Mr. Chairman

Our annual gathering as States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention is always a reminder of the extraordinary nature of our endeavours here at the OPCW. As the only international treaty that comprehensively prohibits an entire category of Weapons of Mass Destruction, the States Parties have every reason to celebrate its achievements. These are most evident in the fact that 97 percent of the declared stockpiles of chemical weapons have been verifiably destroyed. The only possessor State Party remaining has indicated that it will complete its destruction activities by 2023, and we encourage it in its efforts. The system of verification that has been established has served its purposes well. Together, verification of destruction and industry verification, effectively demonstrate that disarmament and non-proliferation succeed in tandem. Important work has also been done with regards to the other two pillars of the Convention, namely, Assistance and Protection and International cooperation. Further progress in these two areas will create further incentives to maintaining the global support for the Convention.

In our inter-connected and inter-dependent world, the pursuit of peace will remain unattainable without mutual cooperation, goodwill and a true spirit of multilateralism. Over the years the OPCW has demonstrated the true efficacy of multilateralism. It has reinforced our view that the goals of disarmament can only be productively realized through equitable and non-discriminatory arrangements, and not through the perpetuation of discrimination and double standards.

After more than two decades of steady progress, there however remain issues requiring attention. Universality of the Convention is essential. Last year the State of Palestine acceded to the Convention, leaving only four states which are still not parties.. Avoiding the obligations of the Convention is naturally a cause for concern. It is therefore important that the Secretariat continues its efforts to persuade non-parties to join the Convention at the earliest. The Conference on its part should renew its call for universality together with a review of the action plan designed to promote this goal.

In September this year, a delegation of the Executive Council undertook a visit to China to see progress on destruction of the Japanese Abandoned Chemical Weapons. Pakistan participated in this mission. We would like to thank China and Japan for extending excellent hospitality and cooperation during the visit, which provided a valuable opportunity to understand the significance and complexity of the issue of Abandoned Chemical Weapons. We appreciate the continuing bilateral cooperation between China and Japan towards elimination of these weapons. We urge a continuation of these efforts so that that all Japanese Abandoned Chemical Weapons in China are eliminated as soon as possible.

Mr. Chairman

We agree with the general view that the Convention and our work needs to be made responsive to contemporary and emerging challenges. We have seen gruesome incidents of the deplorable use of chemical weapons during the last several years. This threat, if not checked and stopped in its tracks, has the potential to seriously undermine the valuable work that has been done for over two decades to make the Convention an effective deterrent against chemical weapons. Pakistan categorically condemns any use of chemical weapons, anywhere, by anyone. We stand ready to ensure through our collective and cooperative means of deliberation that this threat is forever eliminated.

We have read the Director General's recent Report on Progress in the Elimination of the Syrian Chemical Weapons Programme. It underscores the continuing engagement of the Secretariat with the Syrian authorities. We appreciate cooperation from both the sides and support a sustained structured Dialogue. We hope that it would lead to the resolution of all matters considered outstanding. However important the need to bring all these remaining matters to a satisfactory closure as soon as possible, this must be pursued prudently avoiding the divisiveness that has increasingly crept into our work at the OPCW.

It is obvious that the relevance of the OPCW to new priorities can only be ensured in an atmosphere of unity and consensus. That principle has been violated recently on far too many occasions. . The birth of the Attribution Mechanism took place in an atmosphere of acrimony and confrontation. These can never be conducive to the long-term interests of any multilateral institution. Innovations for the sake of advancing the goals of the Convention are not new. The entire Syrian demilitarisation operation was based on a modified application of the CWC. But this followed consensus at every stage. The Attribution Mechanism on the other hand is a major innovation in the Convention. It disrupts the carefully created balance between the authority of the Secretariat and the prerogatives of the policy making organs. The work of the Secretariat when it comes to investigations or inspections is only to provide facts. Questions about judgement belong only to the policy-making organs. The provisions of the Convention make this clear. Given the conflicted manner in which the decision was adopted, there is little prospect that this step will lead to any useful or productive outcome. It is time to revert to the principle of consensus that has been the single most important factor in the success of the Convention until the recent divisions that have created serious doubts regarding our methods of decision making.

Even in this vitiated atmosphere, the example of the two proposals on amending the Schedule of the Annex on Chemicals, serves to highlight the benefits of a measure of cooperation. We support both the US-Netherlands-Canadian Joint proposal as well as the Russian proposal. These additions would strengthen the Convention and would hopefully prevent use of these chemicals in the future. This would further enhance safety and security of the world. It is also a welcome development that sparks a hope for the return of the spirit of compromise and cooperation.

Another positive development is related to NAM plus China proposal that came to fore after the unfortunate end of the Fourth Review Conference. After several months of deliberations we have been able to finally reach consensus on Executive Council Chairman's draft proposal on 'Revitalizing the facilitation framework, enhancing coordination and addressing issues on which progress is sought by States Parties in a non-discriminatory and effective manner.' We would like to thank the EC Chair Ambassador Andrea Perugini and co-facilitators Ambassador Gomez of El Salvador and Ambassador Puja of Indonesia for their untiring efforts towards bringing all of us closer and congratulate them on helping us reach consensus. We hope that this step forward would strengthen the organization and truly revitalize interest of all the States Parties in running of this organization. We hope that the EC Chair would ensure that flexibility shown by NAM States Parties and China would be matched by progress in a manner that would fulfill expectations of all of us.

As we firmly believe that all provisions of the Convention have importance of their own, the ones related to international cooperation and assistance deserve equal attention. The Convention must continue to be implemented in a balanced manner, keeping in view the economic and technological interests of all the States Parties, as it would ensure long-term interests of this organization. It is in this spirit of strengthening the organization and advancing our work that Pakistan has supported the initiative for upgrading the OPCW Lab to Centre for Chemistry and Technology. In addition to enabling the OPCW to exploit cutting-edge science for purposes of improving its verification regime, the Chemtech center would also assist the States Parties through research projects and capacity building programmes. To practically help the project to come to fruition and responding to the Director-General's appeal, Pakistan has made a financial contribution in support of this important project.

Mr. Chairman

The last session of the Executive Council was able to adopt its report. This is a happy sign after the inability of the Council on several occasions to do so and particularly of the 4th Review Conference to adopt a consensus document. These might indicate a positive turn of events; in any case we have to make it so. Under this Convention, we have stood together for a long time to make this world a safer place for ourselves and future generations. We may have differences but our collective resolve to defend humanity from the scourge of chemical weapons must not be lost sight of. I do hope that we shall be able to fully restore the spirit of cooperation and consensus enabling us to make the Convention fully responsive to the challenges we face as a community of nations.

I thank you all.