

Virtual Dialogue on Achieving Gender Balance at the Disarmament Table

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

11 November 14:00

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I warmly welcome you to this dialogue today about a very relevant matter.

At the outset, I wish to thank Ambassador Markovic, Permanent Representative of Sweden to the OPCW, and Ambassador Nilsson from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Sweden, for co-organising and co-hosting this event.

The Chemical Weapons Convention is one of the world's most successful disarmament treaties.

With 193 States Parties, the treaty covers 98% of the global population.

Over 98% of declared chemical weapons stockpiles have been verified as eliminated under the Convention.

In other words, this means that almost 72,000 tonnes of the most dangerous chemicals have been destroyed.

This is a remarkable achievement, and the result of a lot of efforts of many people and also the investment of a huge amount of public money.

Our success is due to the determined work of women and men here in The Hague and in the States Parties to rid the world of chemical weapons.

This effort has involved diplomats, militaries, policy makers, legislators, scientists, and high level experts from around the world.

In recognition of the OPCW's progress to eliminate chemical weapons, the Organisation received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2013.

The OPCW will need knowledge, skills, and expertise to protect this legacy of success and ensure the organisation remains fit for purpose in the future.

The post-destruction era will present new and difficult challenges, including preventing re-emergence of chemical weapons, that can happen in different forms.

We also have to face the challenge of keeping pace with the rapid evolution of science and technology which of course is a very good thing but unfortunately has very dangerous side effects.

To succeed, we will need to harness the talents of the best and the brightest from all States Parties.

This means reaching as many as possible highly qualified potential candidates and encouraging them to direct their talents towards the OPCW's noble goal.

This also means to successfully complete the construction of the new Centre of Chemistry and Technology, which is underway.

Accordingly, one of my first initiatives when I became Director-General in July 2018 was to join leaders around the world in the International Gender Champions network.

Since that time, the OPCW's commitment to the aims of the network has translated into very concrete results.

For the first time in the organisation's history, we have achieved 50% representation of women in the OPCW's top management structure.

We increased the presence of women in the top positions of the Organisation from 10% to 50% in the last two years.

Additionally, I am pleased to communicate to you, that a few days ago I appointed Ms Apea Mensah, a Ghanaian national, as Head of Political Affairs and Protocol, a key position that advises senior management and facilitates relationships with States Parties.

This increase is the result of an improved targeted recruitment process which utilises new channels, including social media, to identify and attract more qualified candidates.

This approach is being taken across the organisation to improve gender balance at all levels.

Achieving gender balance is critical, but it is only the first step.

The Secretariat of the Organisation has launched a number of policies and initiatives to create and sustain an inclusive and supportive workplace for all staff.

This includes dedicated trainings, experience-sharing webinars, a gender and diversity audit of the organisation, and considering a gender perspective in human resource policy making.

We have established Gender Focal Points in all divisions and offices to promote awareness, identify gender-related issues, and increase capacity building.

The Secretariat is also working with States Parties to improve access and opportunities for women around the world to support the implementation of the Convention.

The OPCW is proud to host the annual Women in Chemistry Symposium.

This activity explores the opportunities for women pursuing careers in the chemical sciences, academia, research, and industry.

Most importantly, it provides an interactive forum for sharing experiences and advice to build skills and advance careers.

Women are now heading multinational chemical companies, leading chemical societies, and steering cutting-edge research.

However, we still have much to do.

I welcome the presentation by Ms Hessman Dalaqua, from the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR).

I am confident that UN Institute for Disarmament Research findings regarding the obstacles to women's full participation in disarmament and international security will provide useful insights.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Within the OPCW we believe that our diversity is and will be even more our strength.

I look forward to hearing your views, and your experiences with this important topic today.

As you all know in the health sector the proportion of professional women is very high.

I cannot conclude my remarks without expressing my admiration, respect and solidarity with the many women such as; nurses, doctors, and others that are fighting in a courageous and generous way the pandemic, very often risking their lives.

From here I wish to send them my fondness and appreciation.