



## **Opening Remarks by the OPCW Director-General at the Group S Inspectors Graduation Ceremony**

**As delivered on 20 November 2020, The Hague, Netherlands**

Distinguished Delegates,  
Dear graduates,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to this ceremony to mark the successful completion of the Initial Training Programme for Group S Inspectors.

At the outset, I congratulate our new inspectors on this important occasion. All those receiving certificates today can be justifiably proud of their achievement.

You have joined the OPCW amid the unprecedented challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. This situation postponed your arrival and required a re-shaping of your training programme. I greatly appreciate your adaptability, perseverance, and resilience under these exceptional circumstances. I am pleased that the Secretariat was able to find creative solutions to adapt your programme to these challenges by complementing practical training requirements with online learning opportunities.

Furthermore, I would like to express my special appreciation to the governments of Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the United States of America, for their substantial support for this programme. Indeed, the exercises and courses these States Parties provided have contributed in preparing you to begin your work as OPCW inspectors.

Inspectors,

This is an important time in the OPCW's evolution, as we seek to consolidate our achievements and address the challenges ahead.

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 72,000 tonnes of declared stockpiles of chemical weapons in the world have been verified as eliminated.

The Convention's unique verification regime is a cornerstone of its success. Verification ensures that declared chemical weapons are being eliminated and provides confidence that chemicals are being produced for solely peaceful purposes. The OPCW's inspectors constitute the backbone of this regime.

Regrettably, although remarkable progress has been made, many challenges remain. We are nearing the end of the elimination of declared chemical weapons. As we approach this milestone, our focus is shifting to the difficult challenge of preventing re-emergence and implementing the Convention in its full extent.

Across the world, thousands of tons of toxic chemicals are produced, transported, stored, traded, and consumed daily for entirely legitimate ends. Still, the risk exists that fractions of these dangerous substances, if diverted with ill intent, can cause serious harm. Further, the rapid evolution in chemical substances, science, and technology enhances the potential risk of accidents, with devastating consequences for people, infrastructure, and the environment.

Our ability to attract, maintain, and develop a team of high calibre experts as you in the Secretariat is central to our capacity to prevent the re-emergence of chemical weapons. Inspectors bring diverse educational, professional, and cultural backgrounds from various fields, including industry, research, and academia.

Each year, the OPCW's expert inspectors transfer their wealth of knowledge to the next generation. This allows the Organisation to retain the highest standard of expertise and skills to ensure the organisation is fit for purpose in the future.

The OPCW's future Centre for Chemistry and Technology, or ChemTech Centre, will play an important role in this regard. The ChemTech Centre will include expanded and enhanced facilities for practical, classroom, and laboratory training for inspectors. The Centre will equip the Organisation with the tools and resources needed to adapt to new developments in science and technology. It will create new capacity-building and joint research opportunities and will provide a platform for international cooperation.

Dear Inspectors,

Your predecessors and fellow inspectors have conducted their work with professionalism and commitment. I am confident you will carry forward and strengthen their legacy. We rely on you as we look to the future, for your expertise and dedication.

I once again congratulate you on the completion of your training and wish you every success during your career in the OPCW and a pleasant time in the Netherlands. I look forward to working with all of you.

Thank you for your attention.

\*\*\*\*\*