



Speech by the Director-General of the OPCW, at the Launch of the Competence Network CBWNet: Achievements of the Chemical Weapons Convention and Future Challenges

As delivered on 29 April 2022, Berlin, Germany

Madame State Secretary of the German Federal Foreign Office, (Ms Susanne Baumann)

Herr Chair Barry de Vries,

Herr Dr Ralf Trapp,

I am pleased to be part of this event organised by the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy for the start of the Competence Network, “CBWNet”. I also wish to commend the German Federal Foreign Office and the Federal Ministry of Education and Research for their support to the Network and for this timely event.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This year is a momentous time for the OPCW. We mark the 25th anniversary of the entry into force of the Chemical Weapons Convention and the establishment of the Organisation.

In reflecting on the Convention’s achievements over the past two and half decades, we recognise that it was the outcome of thorough diplomatic negotiations in Geneva, at the end of the 1980s, beginning of the 1990s, when it was possible to work in a very constructive atmosphere. The success of the very long negotiations was also the result of many years of preparatory work involving academia, civil society and governments.

The international community’s determination to ban the use of this abhorrent method of warfare has a long history. The first international agreement limiting the use of chemical weapons dates back to the 17th century, when France and Germany prohibited the use of poisoned bullets. Other attempts followed such as the first and second Hague Conferences at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries. The Geneva Protocol of 1925 prohibiting the use of asphyxiating, poisonous or other gases was another important step.

The signature of the Chemical Weapons Convention in Paris in 1993 was the culmination of a very long process. It meant a great achievement in the field of disarmament.

The destruction of the declared chemical weapons by States Parties will come to an end next year, in 2023. However, current global events underscore that preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons is an agenda that will remain open after the end of the period of destruction that I have just mentioned.

Today, there are fears and threats of the use of weapons of mass destruction, including chemical weapons, in Ukraine. The OPCW has been closely following this serious situation. I recall that all 193 States Parties to the Convention, including the Russian Federation and Ukraine, have solemnly and voluntarily committed, never under any circumstances to develop, produce, acquire, stockpile, transfer or use chemical weapons.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The accomplishments of the Convention are clear, concrete, and lasting. Today, the Organisation counts 193 countries as States Parties to the Convention. This implies that 98% of the world's population is protected by the Convention. In addition, to date more than 99% of all declared chemical weapon stockpiles have been verifiably destroyed. The United States of America, the last chemical weapons possessor State Party, is on track to complete its chemical demilitarisation process in 2023. During this process of destruction, the Organisation has conducted 3,379 inspections of chemical weapon destruction facilities to make certain the possessor States Parties are destroying their declared chemical arsenals.

There has also been significant progress in efforts to destroy chemical weapons abandoned in the last period of World War II by Japan on the territory of China. China and Japan have carried out the excavation, removal, and destruction of more than 60,000 out of 89,000 items declared as abandoned chemical weapons. The OPCW has strictly supervised the destruction of all these weapons.

In addition to the destruction just mentioned, one of the main challenges for the Organisation is to reduce the risks of dangerous chemicals falling into the wrong hands. The chemical industry frequently uses, for peaceful purposes, and in a legal way, chemicals of dual use. In this respect, the Organisation has conducted some 4,232 industry inspections in over 80 States Parties. These inspections verify that the production of relevant chemicals remains solely for authorised purposes. Accordingly, the inspectors of the OPCW travel every week all over the world to conduct specific inspections at chemical industry facilities.

Beyond its activities in disarmament and non-proliferation, the Organisation continues to support the peaceful uses of chemistry through a wide range of practical programmes of international cooperation. These include training in different fields and courses to enhance the skills of first responders in chemical emergency response and management.

The task that the Organisation has accomplished has not gone unnoticed by the international community. In 2013 the OPCW was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for its "extensive efforts to eliminate" chemical weapons.

Despite the huge task that I have already referred to, the long-standing and new threats we currently face demonstrate the formidable challenges that persist. Our response to them is shaping the present and will shape the future of the Organisation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Over the course of the past decade, we have witnessed repeated violations of the global norm against the use of chemical weapons in Iraq, Malaysia, the Russian Federation, the Syrian Arab Republic, and the United Kingdom.

The Syrian Arab Republic accession to the Convention in 2013, generated a special and at present not yet finished task. This is the ninth year of our engagement on the Syrian chemical weapons dossier. It is worrisome that this matter is still not closed. The OPCW's Conference of the States Parties and the Executive Council, have consistently demanded that Syria redress its failure to declare and destroy all its chemical weapons and chemical weapons production

facilities. To this end, our work in Syria continues on multiple fronts, as we implement the mandates provided by decisions of the OPCW's policy-making organs and the United Nations Security Council Resolution.

The Secretariat of the Organisation has also been active in providing advice and assistance to other States Parties in cases of chemical incidents. Technical assistance visits, provided for under Article VIII, paragraph 38(e) of the Convention, have helped the United Kingdom and Germany, to find and identify chemical warfare agents used in those cases.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Incidents of chemical weapons use highlight another issue of serious concern: the potential acquisition and use of toxic chemicals by non-State actors. It has been documented that ISIL used chemical weapons in Syria and Iraq on several occasions.

Accordingly, the OPCW has been addressing the use of chemical weapons by non-State actors in a more comprehensive manner, through its Open-Ended Working Group on Terrorism and through a dedicated decision adopted in 2017. Moreover, the OPCW has been cooperating with agencies such as the United Nations Office of Counter Terrorism and the UN Security Council Resolution 1540 Committee.

A rapidly expanding chemical industry adds further risks, because of the use of dangerous chemicals in the chemical cycle, from research, development, production, to commercialisation and transportation, storage and use. Unfortunately, the risk of diversion of those chemicals exists, and they can fall into the wrong hands to cause a catastrophe.

The challenge lies in how these risks are being managed. Dual-use chemicals are frequently components used in the production of, inter-alia, pesticides, plastics, pigments, herbicides, pharmaceuticals, automobile and aviation industry. Some of them are extremely toxic, some others are not particularly toxic but can be used as precursors for the production of nerve agents. The goal, therefore, must be to prevent these substances from being diverted to cause harm to people and the environment.

Tackling chemical terrorism requires the States Parties to reinforce their approach to chemical safety and security. In this respect, the Hague Ethical Guidelines promote the need to apply the highest ethical standards in research and innovation in the field of chemistry. The Hague Ethical Guidelines were an initiative of Germany at the OPCW. They were taken up by many stakeholders, including the International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry (IUPAC), the International Council of Chemical Associations (ICCA), and the International Chemical Trade Association (ICTA).

The implementation of the Convention is mainly carried out by the States Parties with the active support of the Secretariat of the OPCW. There is no doubt that strengthening the extensive implementation of the Convention at the national level is our first line of defence. In this vein, States Parties have the responsibility to enact and implement necessary legislation in line with national constitutional processes. It requires the involvement and commitment of different national actors and institutions, including parliaments, the judiciary, law enforcement agencies,

customs officials and ministries of foreign affairs, defence, interior, trade, industry, and science, among others.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The OPCW is addressing the hurdles I have mentioned while keeping pace with the impressive speed of developments in science and technology and its negative effects. We constantly work to maintain and develop the knowledge and skills of our teams. If we are successful at training and capacity building programmes for our staff members, I have no doubt that we will be able to continue delivering efficiently.

We find strong and wide support of the States Parties in this undertaking. The construction, near The Hague, of the OPCW's new Centre for Chemistry and Technology, the ChemTech Centre, is a demonstration of this endeavour. The Centre will be a unique tool to contribute to international peace and security.

Three and a half years ago, the ChemTech Centre was only an idea. The majority of the States Parties understood that new premises were required to address the new threats we are facing. The facility will allow us to conduct research, analysis, training, and all kinds of international cooperation and assistance activities, with a view to better implementing the Convention.

Today, the construction of the building of the ChemTech Centre is progressing on schedule and respecting the budget. We expect to complete the construction at the end of this year and to inaugurate the facility in the spring of 2023. This project will be a testimony of the international community's efforts to achieve peace and security, and is a demonstration that despite the difficulties we have had to face in the last two years, the Secretariat of the OPCW has delivered.

On this occasion, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Germany for its strong political and financial support to the project of the ChemTech Centre. Additionally, I also want to express my gratitude to Germany for its cooperation in identifying future projects that will be carried out at the Centre. This is particularly relevant at a time when we are preparing the activities to be conducted and we are deciding the best way to initiate the running of the Centre.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Although the norm against the use of chemical weapons has been challenged in recent years, it remains strong. No actor has acknowledged any involvement in the use of chemical weapons or has ever recognised their use.

The taboo is very strong. Yet, we must remain vigilant to any violation of the norm and stand ready to take action. The success of the Convention over the past quarter century is the result of the commitment and efforts of its States Parties. For its part, despite the political difficulties and the pandemic, the Secretariat has continued to deliver, with conviction and loyalty, on all the mandates it receives.

In this common endeavour we need all stakeholders to play their part. This includes governments, civil society, academia, the chemical industry, and the entire international community. In this respect, I would like to commend the Federal Ministry of Education and Research for funding the Competence Network, "CBWNet" and the four prestigious academic institutions that will be in charge of developing it over the next four years.

I thank you for your attention.
