



Opening Remarks by the Deputy Director-General of the OPCW, Ms Odette Melono, at the Thirteenth Session of the Advisory Board on Education and Outreach

As delivered on 19 July 2022, The Hague, Netherlands

Distinguished Members of the Advisory Board and observers,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure and honour to give this speech on behalf of the Director-General, H.E. Mr Fernando Arias. The Director-General was not able to join us today as he is out of The Netherlands.

On behalf of the Director-General, I would like to welcome you to the Thirteenth Session of the OPCW Advisory Board on Education and Outreach. For the first time since July 2019, the Board is meeting in The Hague, and it is a pleasure to greet you in person at the start of this Session. The diversity of expertise and backgrounds of the Board members is the great asset of this body for the fulfilment of its mandate.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The OPCW is close to achieving the goal of eliminating all declared chemical weapons stockpiles. To date, more than 99% of all declared chemical weapons have been verifiably destroyed, with their complete destruction concluding next year.

However, the OPCW's mission is an open-ended one. This means that the Organisation is evolving and adapting to meet a new era with new challenges, where the prevention of the re-emergence of chemical weapons will grow in importance.

These new challenges stem both from advances in science and technology and a shifting global security landscape. Education and outreach will play a key role in ensuring the ongoing success of the OPCW.

In particular, awareness raising among the younger generations to achieve a deeper engagement in disarmament and non-proliferation is critical for upholding the norm against the use of chemical weapons. Broadening the availability of more educational resources in the OPCW's official languages and others will contribute to this outreach. The Board should also continue to support National Authorities, upon the request of States Parties, to assist them in connecting with the chemical industry, academia, and young professionals. Spreading knowledge of the Convention through these stakeholders enhances its implementation.

Efforts in education and outreach are therefore increasingly being viewed as crucial to safeguarding the Organisation's future. In fact, this theme was stressed at the recent seminar to commemorate the 25th Anniversary of the OPCW, where States Parties voiced their support for strengthening the Organisation's educational activities.

As such, the ongoing work of the Board remains vital to the OPCW, including the work of this session which will consider a number of important issues and initiatives. The Secretariat has assessed relevant recommendations provided by the ABEO Temporary Working Group on e-Learning, and has been working to identify a provider of a new Learning Management System. I trust that this will increase the reach of OPCW courses and educational resources in general and will be of great value to the OPCW's future work.

In parallel, the Secretariat has been identifying a suitable expert to develop university-level learning modules to raise awareness of the OPCW and the Convention among science and social science undergraduates. I am confident that the Board will contribute to this project with recommendations to ensure wide usage of these modules among universities in all regions. I am pleased to see in the programme of work that the Board will devote time to discuss these important aspects.

Another important initiative is the development by the Universidad Autónoma de México, with the support of the Permanent Representation of México, of educational courses for GRULAC States Parties on the OPCW and its mission. These courses, which you will hear more about tomorrow, will focus on recent graduates and young and mid-career professionals with the aim of encouraging them to pursue careers in disarmament.

E-Learning will continue to be a priority area of the Board. As such, I wish to thank Dr Jason Openo for conducting an e-Learning course yesterday for the Secretariat's network of e-Learning focal points.

Finally, I appreciate the Board's decision at its last Session related to presenting the OPCW as an interesting employer during your academic and outreach activities. Promoting professional opportunities at the OPCW among young and mid-career professionals will help increase the pool of qualified candidates from all regions. I encourage you all to continue providing such information at any available occasion.

Distinguished Board Members,

As we look to the next twelve months, there are two important upcoming events.

The Centre for Chemistry and Technology is scheduled to be operational at the beginning of 2023. It will be a world leading facility for strengthening capacity building, as well as expanding the OPCW's education and outreach activities.

The second event is the Fifth Review Conference, which will be held from 15 to 19 May next year. This is an opportunity for States Parties to take stock of the OPCW's achievements and what it should do to remain fit for purpose.

As we approach these milestone events, we must be mindful of the significant tasks that lay ahead for the Organisation. Those who will take the OPCW forward into the future will not necessarily be the same as those who contributed to the accomplishments of the past. Our challenge therefore will be to continue to connect with the next generations, inspire them to engage with the Organisation and the broader disarmament world, and prepare them to take action. I trust the ABEO will assist in this process by providing valuable insights into the OPCW's existing education and outreach projects.

Once again, welcome back to The Hague. Thank you for the important contributions you made to the work of the OPCW. Turning the floor back to you, Mr Chairperson, I wish you fruitful deliberations. I am confident that Luisa and her team will give you all the support you need.

Thank you.
