



## **Keynote Speech by the OPCW Director-General, Ambassador Fernando Arias, at Subregional Forum on the Chemical Weapons Convention: Enhancing National Implementation and Regional Cooperation in the Pacific Region**

**As delivered on 19 October 2022, Brisbane, Australia**

H.E. Mr. Tim Watts, Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs of Australia  
Ambassador Zainol Rahim Zainuddin, Head of the National Authority of Malaysia  
Distinguished participants,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the Government of Australia and the Government of Malaysia for co-organising this conference together with the OPCW. Australia could not be a more befitting host and I am very grateful for the opportunity to be here. Both countries, Australia and Malaysia have long been key partners of the OPCW. At the headquarters of the Organisation in The Netherlands we greatly appreciate their ongoing collaboration in our activities.

I also wish to take this opportunity to warmly welcome the participation of representatives from States Parties of the Asia Pacific region and acknowledge the presence of regional and international organisation representatives, as well. Your involvement in this forum demonstrates your commitment to the disarmament goals of the Chemical Weapons Convention and the critical role you play in enhancing cooperation for international peace and security.

This year is an important one for the Convention as we are marking 25 years since its entry into force and the establishment of the OPCW as an international disarmament body. Over the past quarter century, the Organisation has achieved concrete results in its mission to permanently eradicate chemical weapons from this world.

Despite this successful outcome, much remains to be done. Our goals of disarmament and the responsible and monitored use of chemicals cannot be reached without the full and effective implementation of the Convention by all States Parties, including those from the Asia Pacific region.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Chemical Weapons Convention is a unique disarmament instrument that outlaws an entire category of weapons of mass destruction. It bans the development, production, stockpiling, transfer, and use of chemical weapons without discrimination. All 193 States having acceded to the Convention, without exception, have committed to the goal of elimination and non re-emergence of chemical weapons.

This important commitment is so strong that it aims at the total destruction of all chemical weapons, with zero tolerance. No other treaty has achieved such a far-reaching goal.

The norms prohibiting chemical weapons are very strong and the taboo against their use is solidly anchored. Not a single State has ever admitted to using chemical weapons after acceding to the Convention.

To carry out its mandate, the OPCW relies on a strict international verification regime. The regime provides assurance to the international community that all declared chemical weapon arsenals are verifiably destroyed. It also aims at guaranteeing that chemicals are used exclusively for peaceful purposes.

At present 193 countries have joined the Convention, with only four states yet to do so. In effect, 98% of the world's population enjoys the benefits of the Convention. To date, more than 99% of all declared chemical weapons stockpiles have already been verifiably destroyed.

The United States, the last possessor State Party, is set to complete its stockpile destruction next year. This will be a defining moment for the Organisation, and a historic achievement for multilateral disarmament.

Since its entry into force, the Organisation has carried out 3,394 inspections of chemical weapons destruction facilities, to ensure that the possessor States Parties are fulfilling their obligation to eliminate their stockpiles. In addition, the OPCW has conducted 4,313 inspections of industrial facilities and plant sites, to make certain that chemical-related activities are exclusively for non-prohibited purposes. Such purposes include agriculture, chemical industry, medical, pharmaceutical and research.

The OPCW's focus extends to ensuring that States Parties can enjoy the benefits of the Convention, which confers the right to economic and technological development. For this purpose, the Secretariat has provided training and capacity building programmes to thousands of chemistry experts, chemical engineers, customs officials, first responders, and government officials, among others. We intend to increase the number of programmes after the inauguration of the Centre for Chemistry and Technology next year.

These activities have made a substantive contribution to global peace and security. In recognition of this, in 2013, the OPCW was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for its "extensive efforts to eliminate" chemical weapons.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Despite these achievements, the Organisation and its Member States cannot afford to be complacent. The use and threat of use of chemical weapons during the past decade has demonstrated that preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons is a permanent challenge. Serious violations of the norm have been recorded in Iraq, Malaysia, the Russian Federation, the Syrian Arab Republic, and the United Kingdom.

In the Syrian Arab Republic, the OPCW is in the ninth year of its work related to the chemical weapons dossier. It is a disturbing reality that this file remains unresolved. This is so because the initial declaration of Syria is still inaccurate and incomplete despite the efforts carried out by a team of the Secretariat called the Declaration Assessment Team for more than nine years.

Today, there are fears and threats of the use of weapons of mass destruction, including chemical weapons, in Ukraine. The Secretariat continues to closely monitor this serious situation and

remains in contact with the Permanent Representations of the Russian Federation and Ukraine. The Secretariat has been providing assistance and protection to Ukraine, upon its request, in several different ways under Article X of the Convention. I wish to seize this opportunity to thank the Government of Australia for its generous financial contribution to support the OPCW's activities in Ukraine under Article X. It must be recalled 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.

The collective task to protect the commitment against chemical weapons is a challenging one. The violations of the norm over the past ten years have drawn attention to another serious matter of concern for the Organisation, namely the use of toxic chemicals by non-state actors or terrorists. The OPCW is supporting the States Parties efforts to address the threats posed by non-state actors.

Our efforts are in the following three areas, among others:

- promoting dialogue and information exchange among States Parties;
- cooperating with relevant international organisations, such as Interpol or the World Customs Organisation; and
- building national capacities in the field of chemical security.

Strengthened national chemical safety and security measures are crucial for preventing chemical weapons from re-emerging. The rapid growth of the chemical industry and the associated global commercial trade of chemicals add further to the risks. Monitoring the full production cycle of dangerous chemicals starting from research, development, production, commercialisation and leading to transportation, storage and use, requires significant resources.

In particular, the management of hazardous substances, especially dual-use chemicals, presents a clear challenge in terms of monitoring and maintaining control. Dual-use chemicals are frequently used in the production of pesticides, plastics, pigments, herbicides, pharmaceuticals, in the automobile and aviation industry, etc. Some of these chemicals are extremely toxic while others are not particularly so, but can be used as precursors for producing chemical weapons such as nerve agents. Our goal, therefore, must be to prevent such substances from being diverted to illicit purposes, which could cause harm to people, infrastructure, and the environment.

These measures are particularly important for Pacific Island States, given the role of the region as a major trans-shipment hub for commodities, including hazardous chemicals. There are concerns which are specific to this region; namely, the risk of chemical incidents caused by natural disasters, such as flooding, rising sea levels, and hurricanes. Given the increasing documented impact of climate change on natural disasters, it is now more critical than ever for the Pacific Island States to reinforce your ability to respond to incidents involving hazardous substances.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Expanding national implementation of the Convention is an unfinished yet essential task. But what does it mean to implement the Convention at the national level? First of all, the top priority is to enact appropriate legislation that will allow the law enforcement authorities to implement

the commitments under the Convention. With good legislation, all relevant stakeholders such as judges, customs officials, police officers, first responders, national inspectors of the chemical industry, export/import authorities can fulfil their jobs of implementing the Convention.

Adopting, implementing, and enforcing legislation at the national level is your first line of defence against re-emergence, in particular with respect to the illegal acquisition of toxic chemicals by non-state actors for malicious purposes. Today, 71 States Parties have yet to report the adoption of national legislation covering all the Convention's initial measures. Amongst these States Parties, 35 States Parties do not have any implementing legislation and another 36 have only partial legislation.

In the Pacific region, just five of the 15 States Parties have enacted legislation. Regardless of the size of the chemical industry, full implementation of the Convention by each State Party is vital to better oversee the trade and transit of chemicals. We are committed to helping you to boost your capabilities in this specific area. We have assisted – and remain ready to assist – the States Parties of the Pacific region through training programmes, information exchange, and capacity-building activities to promote best practices in legal processes and enforcement.

We also continuously explore new methods to engage with the States Parties and tailor our technical assistance and capacity building to meet the specific needs and priorities of each State Party. For instance, the Secretariat held a series of legislative drafting workshops in The Hague for five Pacific States Parties in 2018 and 2019. We will continue our efforts so that, all States Parties, including those in the Pacific subregion, are able to fully benefit from being active members of the OPCW.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The OPCW's new 'Centre for Chemistry and Technology', ChemTech Centre, currently being built in the outskirts of the Hague, The Netherlands, will benefit States Parties in all areas of interest. The ChemTech Centre will reinforce the OPCW's verification system and inspection capabilities. It will also strengthen the capacity of the OPCW in research, analysis, training, and more importantly, capacity building for the States Parties to enable them to better implement the Convention.

The construction of the Centre is expected to be completed by end of this year and the facility will be inaugurated in the spring of 2023. I wish to seize this opportunity to thank both the Governments of Australia and Malaysia for your generous financial contributions towards the construction of the Centre.

Concerning the future activities at the Centre, the Secretariat has identified thus far, nine new programmes that could be delivered at the ChemTech Centre once it becomes operational.

These new programmes include, for instance, a capacity building workshop for customs authorities. The workshop will enhance national controls on chemical trade. During this workshop, the new facilities at the Centre will enable us to provide customs officers with hands-on training on how to monitor, control, and safely deal with toxic chemicals. This training will strengthen the skills with practical exercises on how to use modern sophisticated detection, identification and laboratory equipment.

Another new programme, “train-the-trainer” for first responders, will also be relevant for enhancing the preparedness of your countries’ first responders in case of chemical incidents. In this programme, national experts nominated by your countries will be trained on chemical emergency response at the national and subregional level.

The new facilities of the Centre will allow us to conduct activities such as mock chemical emergency scenario-based training, demonstration and practice of the use of relevant equipment and other practical exercises.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The comprehensive implementation of the Convention cannot be accomplished alone. It requires strong cooperation among States Parties in both international and regional context.

This forum aims to provide a valuable and unique platform for States Parties from this region to work together to improve national and regional capacity to better implement the Convention. Furthermore, this forum will allow you to exchange knowledge and good practices related to the effective structure and functioning of National Authorities.

I hope this forum will be a great opportunity for you to reaffirm your commitment to the core values of the Convention. You are not alone in this undertaking: the OPCW stands ready to support all subregional States Parties in your efforts to strengthen the implementation of the Convention.

I thank you very much.

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