



ROYAL NORWEGIAN
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Statement by Ambassador Martin Sørby, Permanent Representative of Norway
to the OPCW at the 21st Session of the Conference of States Parties
The Hague, 28 November – 2 December 2016

Mr Chairperson,
Mr Director-General,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen

Norway fully aligns itself with the statement given by the representative of Slovakia on behalf of the European Union. I will provide a few brief points in my national capacity.

First, I extend my congratulations to the new Chair of the Conference, Ambassador Christoph Israng of Germany. I would like to assure you of our full support and cooperation. Let me also thank the Director-General of the OPCW and all his staff for their dedicated work and commitment during the last year in our common endeavour - to rid the world of chemical weapons.

Mr Chairperson

Our shared determination is explained clearly in the Convention's preamble: for the sake of all humanity to exclude the use of chemical weapons. Because chemical weapons are inhumane. They cause unacceptable harm and suffering. They are inherently imprecise means of warfare and do not distinguish between combatants and protected persons. They have the potential to ruin local communities and cause grave harm to the environment. Their use aggravates conflict and jeopardizes the prospect of lasting peace and development.

That is why we stand together as members of this organisation to prevent the use of chemical weapons.

That is also why we react with horror whenever we learn that chemical weapons have been used - anywhere, in any circumstances and by anyone. Because such attacks deeply shock the conscience of humanity - as expressed in another preamble. The victims of such atrocities deserve our support and care whoever and wherever they are. The perpetrators of criminal attacks must realise that eventually they will be held accountable and that there is no safe haven available to them anywhere. Because their acts are an affront to all humanity and the basic rules of civilisation. As member states of the OPCW we need to react collectively to discourage future atrocities.

The need to follow up on findings reported by the Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM), attributing responsibility for chemical attacks in Syria, is no exception in this regard. Norway is appalled that both the Syrian Arab Armed Forces and the so-called “Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant” (Da’esh) have used chemical means of warfare in the armed conflict in Syria.

Mr Chairperson

As we condemn the recent reported chemical attacks, we are also reminded that it is imperative to prevent toxic chemicals from falling into the hands of individuals or groups intent on causing harm. We are grateful to the facilitators of the working group on terrorism and sub-working group on non-state actors for their efforts in formulating the OPCW’s response to emerging threats. This organisation can indeed play a crucial role in the global response to terrorism with its unique technical capacities and mandate to support and assist in the event of chemical attacks.

OPCW efforts can complement the work of other relevant bodies, including the UN Security Council, its 1540 Committee and the ISIL (Da'esh) & Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee. OPCW fact finding can also assist member states in their investigation and prosecution of perpetrators of chemical attacks. Mutual legal assistance between national authorities should be afforded to the greatest extent possible, through implementing Article VII of the CWC as well as by acceding to other relevant international and regional agreements, including the 1997 UN convention for the suppression of terrorist bombings and the 1999 UN terrorist financing convention.

However, OPCW’s role in combating chemical terrorism should continue to be complementary to activities already carried out by other specialised bodies to avoid duplication of efforts or overlapping mandates.

Mr Chairperson

This organisation’s response to emerging threats of chemical weapons posed by non-state actors is clearly among the challenges that may help define its future priorities. Another relevant issue is developments in science and technology that may introduce new and potentially harmful substances that we did not know of during the time we negotiated the CWC. We commend the OPCW’s outreach and cooperation with science and industry to stay on top of these challenges and to make sure chemical weapons do not resurface when the destruction of declared substances is nearly completed. The OPCW’s Scientific Advisory Board plays an important role in this respect, and we are grateful that a Norwegian expert will soon contribute to the Board’s work.

We are also grateful to the facilitators of the working group on future priorities for the transparent and inclusive way they have set out their programme. Norway looks forward to engaging in this important debate.

In closing, I would like to request that this statement be circulated as an official document of the Conference and be published on the OPCW website and extranet.