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Mr Chairman, Director-General, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is a pleasure to speak on behalf of United Services Institution of India (USI). USI is one of the oldest and renowned think-tanks in India. This is a non-partisan, autonomous think-tank dedicated to objective research and policy relevant studies on aspects of defence and security studies. Research conducted at USI is driven by a comprehensive agenda and includes issues related to Weapons of Mass Destruction. USI offers a forum of debate for highlighting and analysing issues concerning chemical and biological weapons.

Mr Chairman, as we all know OPCW marked the 20th anniversary of its formation on the 29th of April 2017; it is indeed laudable to note the efforts of the organisation in fostering international cooperation to strengthen implementation of the Convention and promote the peaceful uses of chemistry.

It is well known that disarmament figures prominently in Alfred Nobel's will and the Norwegian Nobel Committee through numerous prizes underlining the need to do away with nuclear weapons¹, while at the same time appreciating the exemplary work done by the OPCW. This committee awarded the OPCW the Nobel Peace Prize during 2013 for its extensive efforts to eliminate chemical weapons.

Over the past twenty years, approximately 95% of chemical weapon stockpiles declared by possessor states have been eliminated under the supervision of the OPCW. In total, there are 192 states which are in agreement with this Convention.

Mr. Chairman, the 2013 Nobel Peace Prize awardee deserves credit for handling the Syrian chemical weapons issue very professionally. Although the bulk of the Syrian challenge with regard to the elimination of chemical weapons stockpiles is over, there is still a need to ensure that the remaining chemical weapons from Syrian soil are completely eliminated.

¹ http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2013/press.html, accessed on 5th April 2017

Mr. Chairman, it has been observed in recent past that Syria has again posed a major challenge to the convention. Syria sent a letter to the United Nations Secretary General in 2013 stating that the Assad government had signed a legislative decree providing the accession of Syria to the Chemical Weapons Convention. Syria also declared that the state would abide by all the obligations of the Convention and also ship out its chemical weapons and destroy its production facilities, with the help of an international coalition, and declared that chemical weapons were completely removed from the country by June 2014². However, the Syrian challenge remains far from over looking into recent developments.

Mr. Chairman, one of the major findings of the OPCW report submitted to the Security Council during August 2016³, is that the Syrian military had dropped chemical weapons on the towns of Talmenes during April 2014 and Sarmin in March 2015. On April 4, 2017, chemical weapons were found used in an attack that killed more than 70 people in Syria's northern Idlib province. It appears that sarin gas was used in this attack. The attack is believed to have been perpetrated by the Syrian government. However, President Assad has sturdily denied any involvement of his regime. Presently, it is becoming difficult to identify which agency is using chemical weapons in the Syrian theatre.

Today, the challenge posed by terrorist organisations indicates that there is no scope for complacency about the chemical weapon threat in spite of the Chemical Weapons Convention being the most successful multilateral disarmament treaty in history. The danger from any possible covert CW proliferation by terrorist organisations should not be underestimated.

Mr Chairman, the CWC and OPCW have greatly contributed to norm building against chemical weapons. In the 21st century, the threat owing to terrorism and asymmetric conflict has risen substantially and the Syrian case is an eye-opener.

The destruction of the two largest declared chemical weapons stockpiles in Russia and the US was lingering for many years. Both these states were having genuine difficulties owing to the enormous volume of their stockpiles. Also, since their stockpiles were mostly in the form of weaponised munitions, the demilitarization process was taking more time for destruction. Russia has successfully destroyed their weapon stockpiles, at least in first stage, on the 27th of

² <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/cwcglance>, accessed on 3rd April 2017

³ <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=54752#.WPcMD4VOLIU> accessed on November April 2016

September 2017.⁴ Seven of the nine US disposal facilities completed their work in 2012 and have now closed. The last US destruction facility is set to eliminate its stockpile by 2023.⁵

During the last two decades of its journey, the OPCW has performed work and its responsibilities with the utmost sincerity. However, the OPCW still has a long way to go and we all need to remain vigilant.

Finally, I would like to note my appreciation for the efforts made by the OPCW for engaging various non-governmental stakeholders to play a constructive role towards fulfilling the CWC's mandate.

I thank you Mr Chairman – and thank you all for your kind attention.

⁴ <https://www.opcw.org/news/article/opcw-marks-completion-of-destruction-of-russian-chemical-weapons-stockpile/>

⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/27/world/europe/russia-putin-chemical-weapons.html>