

**Prof. Ulf Schmidt, Dphil, Oxon, PGCHE, FRHistS
Fritz-Haber-Institute, Max-Planck-Society/University of Kent**

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Mr. Chairman, Director-General, Distinguished Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Since 1997, the Chemical Weapons Convention has performed a vital role in the control and destruction of chemical weapons. Its strength lies in its global reach and ambitious vision: a world free from chemical weapons. Its success is based on its multilateral approach to tackling the challenges that the proliferation of chemical weapons present to the world. This has been achieved in no small part because of the contributions of civil society. The involvement of academia, industry, and other stakeholders through outreach programmes, training, seminars and workshops internationally has not only increased collective understanding of the importance of the OPCW, but has provided a mechanism for informed policy making decisions. It is this aspect, the issue of “global partnership”, that I wish to talk about today.

Mr Chairman,

Rather than looking for simple answers, we should embrace complexity and context. It is here where civil society—especially academia—can make a difference. Most would agree that we should aim to push for a global response to issues like Syria. Our focus needs to be a “rules-based approach” but that is “global”—driven by the many, not the few. We should no longer look for the lowest common denominator but one that embraces a new vision for our fractured world; not unlike those who after the World Wars dreamed of a more united, safer, healthier future for all.

Mr Chairman,

The OPCW undoubtedly needs to be strengthened. Despite the success of the CWC, the world is changing as unconventional uses of toxic chemicals and the increased use of “hybrid information warfare” have become a major concern. These novel issues need to be addressed as a worldwide community. Something does indeed need to be done, but it must be well informed and based on the application of globally accepted rules. We should be willing to engage with the complexity of the problem, have the courage to look at the CWC and consider its strengths and possible weaknesses. Should CW “research”, for example, be declared? Should the definition of CW “use” be more precise? How should we respond to the unconventional use of toxic chemicals as recently seen in Britain?

Mr Chairman,

In order to strengthen the OPCW’s capabilities the issue of “hybrid information warfare” must be tackled. To support the OPCW in its engagement with civil society, strategies should be developed to counter disinformation. By utilising the experience of academia, we can help ensure a balanced,

informed approach to policy making that will create greater public and professional awareness of the issues the CWC faces. Challenges can be given context, complexity can be explored and further credibility can be added to the discourse. History tells us that knowledge—rather than dividing—can bring communities and nations together.

Mr Chairman,

The OPCW can utilise the skills of a neutral and unbiased network of scholars to ensure that knowledge is not lost between generations. New ideas can be tested in safe environments. As the OPCW faces the challenge of the conflict in Syria, and considers how it can more effectively manage the situations of tomorrow, context is vital. Historical studies can provide this, and the universities of the world are the ideal place to construct a global network of academics and professionals for a concerted response to current and emerging challenges. Much has been achieved, but now is the time to ensure that going forward the OPCW strengthens its engagement with the societies of the world to combat the problems of unconventional toxic chemicals, hybrid information warfare and disinformation, that if left unchecked, may have serious consequences.

Mr Chairman,

Something needs to be done and I call for the establishment of a “Global Partnership Programme” under the aegis of the OPCW to strengthen engagement with Civil Society so that together we can meet the evolving challenges presented by current and future chemical weapons development.

Thank you for your attention.