



ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS
Regional Table Top Exercise on Chemical Emergency Response for GRULAC States Parties
Remarks by the Deputy Director-General
Mexico City, Mexico
6 November 2017

REMARKS AS DELIVERED

Distinguished representatives,
Ladies and gentlemen,

At the outset I would like to avail myself of this opportunity to express my appreciation to the Government of Mexico for hosting today's Regional Table Top Exercise on Chemical Emergency Response.

Assistance and protection against chemical weapons attack is a right enjoyed by all States Parties under the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). Mexico has been a long-standing supporter of Article X implementation, both internationally and within the GRULAC region. On behalf of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) I would like to extend my gratitude to the Mexican Government for its diligent efforts in this important area.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As we celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the CWC entering into force and the founding of the OPCW, the Organisation and the Convention's States Parties are justifiably proud of their achievements. Today, 96 percent of chemical weapon stocks declared by States Parties have been destroyed under the verification of the OPCW, and the demilitarisation process will be fully completed by 2023.

In 2013, the Organisation undertook the unprecedented and ambitious task of removing and destroying Syria's entire declared chemical weapons programme. Despite the challenges that we faced in that country, the OPCW in cooperation with the United Nations, the European Union, and 30 States Parties, was able to conclude this task within 12 months.

In addition, our universality activities have built a membership to the Convention that covers 192 countries, including all the GRULAC states. This has made the CWC the most universally adhered to disarmament and non-proliferation treaty in the world.

Against this backdrop of successes, however, the Organisation cannot disregard the challenges – both existing and emerging – to the Convention.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The rapid development of chemistry and the expansion of the chemical industry that we are witnessing have raised high prospects for the improvement in the health, happiness, and economic well-being of societies. But with these changes come risks, none more worrying than the threat of chemical terrorism.

Non-state actors, such as terrorist groups and criminal gangs, neither respect the international norms against the use of chemical weapons nor international borders. The globalised nature of the world in which we live, with its ever-increasing free movement of people and goods between countries and regions, means that the dangers of non-state actors acquiring toxic chemicals is a problem for all.

To fulfil its own role under Article X of the Convention to provide emergency measures of assistance, last year the Technical Secretariat established a Rapid Response and Assistance Mission (RRAM). The objective for creating the RRAM is to swiftly aid, upon request, States Parties affected by a chemical weapons attack carried out by a non-state actor, such as terrorist groups, as well as to enhance the Organisation's readiness to investigate and assess such attacks.

It is from this perspective that we need to view the importance of Article X of the CWC and the assistance obligations that it carries. Regional coordination is relevant to the goals of Article X and should serve to aid the States Parties that are not fully equipped with the necessary capabilities to respond to chemical attacks or emergencies.

Accordingly, since the Third Review Conference of the CWC in 2013, the Technical Secretariat has been working to strengthen capacity building at the regional and sub-regional level. We have done this to make better use of existing capabilities and expertise found across regions for providing rapid assistance to States Parties upon request under Article X.

Our cooperation with regional States Parties has been integral to creating a more robust basis for ensuring assistance and protection. During the last five years the Secretariat has counted on the support of many States Parties in the GRULAC region to participate in the joint design and hosting of exercises and training programmes. Disseminating knowledge and skills in accordance with the needs of the States Parties was a primary objective of these activities. Once again, I must commend Mexico for its active work in this area. It was one of several States Parties who served as the closing stage of the Fourth Advanced Regional Full-Training Cycle last year.

Since 2014, six full training cycles for first responders of the GRULAC region have been completed in several facilities offered by States Parties for sharing and reproducing their expertise. Leveraging existing knowledge to train relevant emergency personnel has boosted institutional development among States Parties, bolstering the sustainability of their own training capacity.

The Technical Secretariat is pleased with the results of these capacity building activities and we are encouraged by the ongoing involvement by key States Parties to share their different experiences and exchange information.

In line with initiatives to increase regional readiness, the OPCW has recognised that it needs to bolster its own ability to train and collaborate with scientists and laboratories. Accordingly, the Organisation has launched a project to transform the OPCW Laboratory into a Centre for Chemistry and Technology. Along with augmenting and adding to the Laboratory's research and analysis capabilities, the aim of this project is to enhance our capability to assist States Parties in capacity building, which will further boost knowledge sharing.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Through the joint efforts of the Secretariat and the States Parties of the region, the expertise of National Authorities, emergency services, and other organisations in responding to chemical incidents has been growing across the GRULAC region. Such concerted activities serve as an important basis for the strengthening of regional coordination.

Nonetheless, it needs to be acknowledged that the perception of chemical risk differs from country-to-country across Latin America and the Caribbean. Reaching a mutual understanding of the hazards and dangers is, therefore, a crucial aspect of your activities today. It is only from a common standpoint that we will be able to secure our common security goals.

We hope that your deliberations during today's exercise will identify useful recommendations that will further enable the OPCW to take advantage of regionally established response mechanisms in support of the goals of Article X. Doing so will increase regional readiness to promptly react to a chemical attack and provide the necessary assistance on the ground to those who need it the most.

We also hope that the exercise will contribute to the training of national stakeholders on coordination and management practices to effectively manage chemical incidents and create the sound conditions for the establishment of effective cooperation links between relevant domestic authorities.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As always in this kind of event, participants should enjoy the advantages of networking and information exchange with other emergency and response experts from across the region. This is also in line with the objectives of this capacity building activity and Article X implementation goals.

Building bridges with counterparts from countries in your own neighbourhood is as important as building institutional capacity in your own country. I therefore encourage you to make the most of today's exercise to reach out to one another in an effort to strengthen links. As the motto of the OPCW underlines, we need to work together for a chemical weapons free world.

I wish you the best in your deliberations and activities.
