



ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION
OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

“First Advanced Regional Assistance and Protection
Course on Chemical Emergency Response for
States Parties in Latin America and the Caribbean”

Opening Remarks by:

Mrs Grace Asirwatham, Deputy Director-General
OPCW

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[Attending Authorities ...] Excellencies, Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to be in Buenos Aires and a particular privilege to address this First Advanced Regional Assistance and Protection Course on Chemical Emergency Response for States Parties in Latin America and the Caribbean.

I wish to express my deep appreciation to the Government of Argentina and its National Authority for supporting this important event and for the excellent arrangements they have made.

Over the next few days the participants who are attending this course will benefit from the expert technical training and exchange of information and experiences regarding the implementation of Article X of the Convention.

The development of a mechanism for emergency response and assistance in case of use or threat of use of chemical weapons is a key element in the implementation of the Convention as a crucial security regime. States Parties of the OPCW have repeatedly stressed the importance of maintaining a high level of readiness to provide timely assistance and protection in emergency situations, as well as to conduct investigations in cases where use of chemical weapons is suspected.

In about two weeks from today, the Chemical Weapons Convention will complete fifteen years of its operation. During the last fifteen years the Organisation has recorded many important achievements including progress towards its universal acceptance.

Elimination of all declared chemical weapons has remained a key goal of the OPCW. To date, 71 percent of the declared CW stockpiles have been destroyed. Three of the seven declared possessors have completed the elimination of their stockpiles. The Organisation will continue to verify the destruction of the remaining stockpiles until the job is done. It will not be long before this remainder is also eliminated.

The OPCW will continue its work to ensure that production and consumption of scheduled chemicals and the operations of other chemical production facilities, as defined by the Convention, remain dedicated for peaceful purposes. With the potential of chemical warfare agents also being produced in commercial facilities, the Convention extends the reach of verification to the global chemical industry. This should be seen as a confidence building measure that will sustain the long-term viability of the Convention as an instrument of security against chemical weapons. Around 5000 industry facilities around the world are considered to be relevant for the purposes of inspection under the Convention. So far over 2,200 inspections have been conducted. Together with refining our industry verification regime for better focus and intensity, we also need to initiate serious consideration of the impact of emerging technologies.

The Convention, as a balanced international treaty is not only about obligations. It also creates important rights for its members. Articles X and XI of the Convention relating to assistance and protection against chemical weapons and international cooperation for peaceful purposes stipulate some of the most important rights of States Parties. One of the key areas of our work is the one that is of most relevance to this regional course on chemical emergency response.

Article X establishes the right of States Parties to request and receive assistance and protection against the use or threat of use of chemical weapons. Such assistance may include the provision of advice on protective and response measures, and the provision of protective equipment such as chemical agent detectors, protective clothing, decontamination equipment, medical help and equipment, including antidotes.

To achieve full implementation of Article X, two key obligations have to be fulfilled: Member States are required to submit annual declarations on national protective programmes and information on the type of assistance measures that can be offered through the Organisation to respond to a chemical weapons attack in a State Party.

To ensure transparency of the assistance and protection mechanisms of the Convention, each State Party is required to provide the OPCW with annual information on its existing protective programmes under paragraph 4 of Article X. This information facilitates the compilation of data thus facilitating the preparations for protective capacity-building projects at national and regional level. Information from these declarations is also indispensable for the delivery of assistance operations.

In 2011, 78 Member States provided annual information to the Secretariat. While 78 States Parties is a considerable number, it represents, however, less than half of our total membership. There is a need to enhance reporting from this region and I encourage you all to play your part in strengthening this particular aspect of Article X.

The OPCW mechanism to respond to a chemical weapons attack relies on the offers of assistance that are provided by Member States. This assistance can take three different forms: a financial contribution to the Voluntary Fund for Assistance; the conclusion of an agreement with the OPCW specifying the kind of assistance they would be able to deliver on request, or simply a declaration of the kind of assistance they would be able to provide in response to an appeal by the OPCW.

So far, 44 States Parties have contributed a total amount of € 1,424,593 to the Voluntary Fund for Assistance and have declared unilateral offers of assistance. Two States Parties have concluded bilateral agreements on the provision of assistance that includes Peru from this region. In all, 77 Member States have pledged different forms of assistance under Article X of the Convention.

A renewed interest in the OPCW's coordination of emergency assistance to States Parties has been generated in view of the threat of terrorism involving chemical weapons.

Provision of timely and effective assistance is a complex undertaking as the Organisation's ability to respond adequately also depends on coordination with various agencies in the field.

A quick and efficient response is the key to countering the impact of an attack with chemical weapons or toxic chemicals. This can only be achieved by a full national or regional response to the incident. The Secretariat has developed the concept of CWC Assistance and Protection Centres for training and preparing trainers within a region and for improving regional cooperation and national protective capacity. This regional concept requires tools, including guidelines, training modules and also equipment that can only be provided by those Member States that already have advanced national protective programmes.

New tools, such as e-learning, will help the Secretariat to provide theoretical training on protection against chemical weapons to a broader audience and improve the quality of practical training for trainers. The OPCW is currently developing an e-learning training project.

As a result of a comprehensive prohibition on the use of chemical weapons established by the Convention, the work of the OPCW has led to greatly reducing the dangers of chemical weapons. But the possibility of their use cannot yet be excluded.

In addition to the measures that I have mentioned, the OPCW conducts simulations, practise challenge inspections and field exercises covering the various scenarios involving the use of chemical weapons. The purpose of these exercises is to test our capabilities and to keep our selves in readiness.

A major field exercise called "ASSISTEX 3" was held in Tunisia, in October 2010. This activity was meant to strengthen our preparedness to deliver assistance and protection in an emergency situation. It was the first such exercise conducted outside of Europe and combined a mock investigation of alleged use of chemical weapons with an assistance and protection exercise. ASSISTEX 3 enabled us to test the scope of our cooperation and coordination with other organisations in the framework of multi-agency emergency response, including our partners from the United Nations, stakeholders from the region and local emergency management authorities and response units.

The work of the OPCW makes a substantial contribution to promoting international peace and security. Our accomplishments over the last 15 years provide hope and reinforce our determination to deal with the challenges that we will face in the future.

The lack of universality of the Convention in certain parts of the world remains a matter of concern. Without universal adherence, the objective of a world free of chemical weapons will remain elusive. The OPCW has called upon the remaining 8 countries to join the Convention without delay, and I would like to take this opportunity to invite you to support our efforts in this direction.

A Conference is expected to be held in Finland later this year to consider the issue of making the Middle East, a zone free from all weapons of mass destruction. It is our hope that this endeavour will promote the universality of the CWC in that sensitive part of the world. The OPCW will make its contribution towards the success of the Conference.

Another challenge before us is effective national implementation. We cannot fully reap the benefits of disarmament and non-proliferation without effective domestic implementation of the Convention by all our States Parties. It is crucial for all States Parties to have in place the administrative structures and the domestic legislation necessary to give legal effect to their obligations under the CWC.

States Parties need to ensure that national implementation leaves no loopholes in domestic legal systems that might compromise full compliance with the provisions of the Convention.

Though the OPCW is not an anti-terrorism agency, the comprehensive prohibition against chemical weapons that it is mandated to promote strengthens our ability to deal with the issue of global terrorism. OPCW's role and contribution in this respect accords entirely with the objectives of the United Nations Security Council's Resolution 1540. The Organisation's role is also clearly recognised in the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2006 and which the Assembly reaffirmed in 2008.

Science and technology are also advancing rapidly and in the process show capacity for producing new and novel chemicals. The structure of the chemical industry is transforming with the ability to produce new chemicals with new methods and techniques. We, therefore, need to be ready to adapt the Convention's mechanisms accordingly in order to keep abreast of these advances and ensuring that the Convention's prohibitions are not circumvented.

As we steadily progress towards achieving the complete elimination of the remaining chemical weapons stockpiles, the destruction activities and the amount of resources dedicated to it will be gradually reduced. This will allow us to dedicate more attention to the objective of preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons and to their non-proliferation. In the coming years this change of focus will impact our human resource requirements and require internal changes in the Secretariat to ensure operational effectiveness and an unaffected ability to respond to future contingencies.

At a time of change we will seek to ensure that the Organisation continues to fully serve the fundamental objectives of the CWC, namely, to ensure that chemical weapons remain forever eliminated.

The success of our work and the challenges that lie ahead shall be reviewed at the Third Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties to Review the Operation of the Convention (Third Review Conference), to be held in The Hague next year. The Conference will provide a valuable opportunity to revitalise our efforts to complete unfinished business as well as to adapt the Convention to future needs and challenges.

Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

This week you are going to have an intense programme. This advanced training course organised with the generous support of the Argentinean Government and based upon this country's expertise in the field of emergency response is an important part of the OPCW capacity building efforts. It will provide a forum in which you will be able to share your national experiences in the practical implementation of Article X. It brings together representatives of national public institutions, as well as the private sector, all of whom will be associated with offers of assistance to States Parties.

You will review the activities related to assistance and protection that the OPCW has previously engaged in, as well as the progress that it has made in implementing Article X of the Convention. At the same time, you will have an opportunity to benefit from advanced training and expert advice.

I wish to encourage all participants to draw on the opportunity of this Regional Course to actively participate and contribute to the benefit of national and regional advancement in the area of chemical emergency response.

I wish you all every success.
Thank you.