

12th Regional Meeting of National Authorities in Asia

Opening Remarks by Grace Asirwatham OPCW Deputy Director-General

New Delhi – 16 July 2014

Mr Chairman,
Distinguished colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a special privilege and pleasure for me to address the Twelfth Regional Meeting of National Authorities of State Parties in Asia.

I would like to start by expressing my deep appreciation to the Government of India and its National Authority for hosting this important event at very short notice. The excellent arrangements they have made, and their warm hospitality is very much appreciated.

This event is yet another demonstration of India's commitment to the goals enshrined in the Chemical Weapons Convention.

It also says something about the commitment to the CWC that makes itself so palpably felt in the Asian region.

The presence of over 45 participants from 32 States Parties here today underlines the importance that Asian states attach to the Convention and to efforts to enhance its implementation.

Regional meetings such as this one provide a valuable forum for National Authorities to come together to share experiences and develop networks, but also to enhance regional and sub-regional cooperation.

Such examples of fruitful co-operation have been demonstrated time and again through events hosted by Asian State Parties this year.

China, Japan, Malaysia, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Saudi Arabia and Singapore deserve our sincere appreciation for their generous contributions and supporting regional OPCW events and courses.

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I am also pleased to see that an Australian representative is with us here today.

The presence of Australia at this meeting is a strong reminder of our cross-regional interaction and cooperation. Australia has been active in the region, having most recently hosted a workshop in Brisbane for Pacific Island States in May this year.

I am confident that this sort of cooperation will continue to blossom in the future.

Our meeting today reminds us that National Authorities form the backbone of the Convention.

Over the last fifteen years this backbone has gotten stronger and stronger, as annual meetings such as this one have provided National Authorities in the Asia-Pacific with important opportunities for experience-sharing and enhancing cooperation on practical implementation-related issues.

As you are well aware, the past year has been an extremely busy one for the OPCW.

Recent months have seen truly momentous developments for chemical disarmament.

The use of chemical weapons in Syria last summer reminded us of the horrific impact of these barbarous weapons.

Syria's subsequent accession to the Convention opened up an opportunity to rid the world of a major chemical arsenal.

A few weeks ago, the last chemicals were removed from Syria, marking a key milestone in the historic mission to eliminate Syria's chemical weapons.

This milestone brings us even closer to our goal of achieving a world free of chemical weapons.

With destruction of Syria's chemical weapons proceeding apace and 190 States now party to the CWC, this goal is no longer a distant dream – it is a rapidly approaching reality.

Our achievements have not gone unnoticed. Last year the OPCW was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of our efforts to eliminate chemical weapons.

But we still have some way to go.

Syria has shown that our success can only be as broad as our reach.

It is high time for all countries across the globe to commit to the chemical weapons ban.

Of the six countries which are yet to join the CWC, three are from the Asian Regional Group, namely Israel, Myanmar and North Korea.

Myanmar is an original signatory to the CWC, which we understand is now making preparations to ratify the Convention.

We are especially pleased to welcome a representative from Myanmar at this meeting, which we hope will add further impetus to Myanmar's accession to the CWC.

We look forward to welcoming Myanmar as a State Party to the CWC in the very near future.

Ladies and gentlemen,

With the successful completion of our destruction activities in sight, our focus is gradually shifting away from disarmament to non-proliferation and peaceful uses of chemistry.

More attention will have to be devoted to monitoring the global chemical industry and trade in chemicals worldwide to prevent the re-emergence of chemical weapons.

Let me say a few words about this.

The chemical industry plays a vital role in ensuring the Convention's lasting success, contributing, in this way, to global peace and security.

The OPCW will continue to work to improve the transparency and efficiency of our interaction with industry across the world.

This will involve assisting governments and national authorities in establishing required safety and security standards.

This will also involve ensuring more effective import and export controls, as well as developing productive partnerships with new stakeholders.

Due to the dynamic nature of chemical production, verification of Article VI industry sites will become increasingly important for underwriting the integrity of the Convention.

In order to strengthen the internal capabilities of individual States Parties, National Authorities will need to be as well equipped as possible for effectively monitoring their domestic chemical industries.

Just as important is ensuring that safeguards enshrined in the Convention are fully adhered to.

This is something that is very relevant to many countries represented here today, especially as the shift in the centre of economic gravity continues to shift eastwards, with a corresponding shift in production capability in the global chemical industry. Many countries in this region are becoming global powerhouses for chemical industry.

One of the messages we seek to convey in the face of such developments is that compliance with the Convention is not intended to hamper economic or technological progress – indeed, quite the opposite.

It is with this objective that the Doha Regional Centre for CBRN Training will be hosting a Regional Meeting of Chemical Industry Representatives and National Authorities in Asia this November.

This is a new initiative developed in conjunction with the Technical Secretariat and will be the first of its kind

All States Parties enjoy the same rights and obligations, and an important aspect of the Convention is to guide cooperation and activities that promote chemistry for peaceful uses.

Indeed, this is an integral part of the holistic regime that the Convention represents – one that recognises that durable security must be based on trust, cooperation and shared prosperity.

For us to succeed in these crucial areas, we will need to muster strong partnerships involving a wide spectrum of actors: from policy-makers, scientists and international organisations, to chemical industry representatives, academia and civil society.

These partnerships can only enhance implementation of the Convention and position us even better for meeting future challenges.

We must nurture and strengthen them in the spirit of the effective multilateralism which brought about the Convention and continues to be embodied in the work of the OPCW.

Dear colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

The Convention is only effective when its prohibitions and prescriptions are embodied in the national legislative mechanisms of Member States.

Without proper national implementation, we run the risk of undermining the integrity of this important treaty.

It is with this in mind that we must spare no effort in accelerating national implementation of the Convention and ensuring we have all possible legislative and enforcement tools in place to this end.

For its part, the Technical Secretariat stands ready to assist you every step along the way. National Authority Mentorship and Legal Internship Programmes conducted by the Secretariat are some of the steps in this direction.

I strongly encourage all National Authorities to keep the Technical Secretariat informed of their national implementation efforts, as well as to take advantage of the activities conducted by the Technical Secretariat to help accelerate such efforts and to bring them to fruition.

It remains only for me to wish you a productive and successful meeting.

It is my hope that its outcomes will help us draw useful insights, which will boost our work on implementation of the Convention in Asia and beyond.

Thank you.