



ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

International Conference on Chemical Disarmament and Security:

OPCW's Contribution to Global Peace and Security

Keynote Address by Mr Hamid Ali Rao, Deputy Director-General of the OPCW

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REMARKS AS DELIVERED

H.E. General, Chief of the Staff, Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to address you at this important conference. I take this opportunity to commend Qatar for its commitment to the aims and objectives of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). Qatar's consistent support for programmes aimed at building national and regional capacity through the OPCW's international cooperation and assistance programmes testifies to its invaluable support for the work of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). I wish to express our heartfelt appreciation to the Government of Qatar and its National Authority.

This Conference serves the dual purpose of affording us an opportunity to reflect on our shared progress to eliminate chemical weapons, and to reflect on future challenges. It brings together representatives from international organisations, the industry, and governments. This is a unique opportunity to discuss our progress as an international organisation dedicated to cause of peace and security in the world and how we can by working together strengthen this role of the OPCW. Recent use and reports of the continued use of chemical weapons are a matter of grave concern and call for a redoubling of our efforts to permanently eradicate this menace from the world.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the Chemical Weapons Convention and the founding of the OPCW. It is an appropriate time to take stock of what we have accomplished and what remains to be done, especially, in the face of new developments and challenges. The Convention's entry into force in 1997 marked a historic moment. It was the first multilateral treaty to ban an entire class of weapons of mass destruction. The Convention is no ordinary treaty. Our States Parties have declared that "the Chemical Weapons Convention remains a unique multilateral agreement banning an entire category of weapons of mass destruction in a

non-discriminatory and verifiable manner under strict and effective international control” and that “it sets new standards for global disarmament and non-proliferation.”

Today, 192 nations are States Parties to the Convention, meaning that 98% of the world’s population lives under its protection. Because of the commitment of these States Parties, we are approaching the complete elimination of declared chemical weapons. Nearly 95% of more than 70,000 tonnes of declared chemical weapons have been destroyed under verification by the OPCW. This is an unprecedented achievement. In 2016, the OPCW successfully removed Libya’s remaining chemical weapons, ensuring they will not fall into the wrong hands. Destruction of these weapons will be completed by year end at the GEKA destruction facility in Munster, Germany. This achievement was made possible through the cooperative efforts of a dozen countries.

In Syria, the OPCW faced a formidable challenge. The operation to remove and eliminate Syria’s declared chemical weapons was unprecedented. Here again a remarkable international effort was undertaken requiring the support of all States Parties. The mission in Syria was enabled by the international community’s determination to enforce the prohibitions of the Chemical Weapons Convention. This collective commitment built the consensus needed to extend the application of the Convention to deliver on its true aims.

This was reflected in our Member States’ willingness to agree to the removal of weapon stocks for destruction outside of Syrian territory, a decision that was endorsed by the UN Security Council. In the end, the Syria mission strengthened the Convention by extending, and reaffirming, the rules governing its implementation. In particular, it made it even more responsive to contingencies. The clearest evidence of this is how the OPCW continues to address allegations of use of chemical weapons in Syria. In 2014, an OPCW Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) confirmed the use of chlorine as a weapon in northern Syria and, more recently, attacks involving the use of sulfur mustard by Daesh.

Importantly, the UN Security Council established the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) to build on this mission. Its purpose was to identify the perpetrators of these and other chemical weapon attacks in Syria – and hopefully, to bring them to justice. The first JIM report following the extension of its mandate has been issued. The OPCW is seriously concerned about the alleged chemical weapons attack in the Khan Shaykhun area of southern Idlib in Syria on 4 April. FFM is in the process of gathering and analysing information from all available sources and its findings will be reported to the OPCW’s Executive Council and States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention. We strongly condemn the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere and under any circumstances.

The Convention not only bans chemical weapons, but it also gives us the means to verify this prohibition is being respected. All countries with chemical plants that are regarded as capable under the Convention, must allow inspections by the OPCW. Since its inception, the

Organisation has conducted nearly 3500 industry inspections to verify that the production and consumption of chemicals are intended for solely peaceful purposes. Today, the global chemical industry is growing. States Parties have declared over 5,300 chemical production facilities, which are producing an ever wider range of new compounds. In this way, chemistry has great potential to drive innovation, progress and economic growth. The OPCW realizes that progress in science must be matched by a continued strengthening of law and its underlying ethical norms and practices.

Maintaining a close relationship with National Authorities, scientists and experts, industry, international partners and non-government organisations is important for global chemical security and the effectiveness of the Convention. In January this year, the Technical Secretariat signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the World Customs Organisation (WCO). The MOU sets the terms for coordination with the WCO, which is necessary to enforce the regime for transfers of scheduled chemicals on a global scale. This strengthened partnership will enhance the security of the global supply chain.

Throughout the history of the Convention, the global norm seemed to be an effective bulwark against the use of chemical weapons. Yet, as we have recently seen, its core prohibitions are being violated. In the face of new threats, especially, terrorism, full implementation of the Convention by all OPCW States Parties is critical. The Convention is not an anti-terrorism instrument. However, the full enforcement of the Convention's legal framework offers the best defence against this threat.

To this end, legislation and enforcement mechanisms are needed at the national level to ensure that national legislation criminalises the development, production, stockpiling and transfer of chemical weapons. In other words, the full and effective implementation of the Convention under the domestic laws of all 192 of our Member States would help deter and combat acts of chemical terrorism.

We assist our States Parties in this important area through training programmes, information sharing, and capacity-building activities. These are designed to promote best practices in legal processes and enforcement. The Technical Secretariat reviews drafts of implementing legislation to ensure that they meet the requirements of the Convention. The OPCW's Internship Programme for Legal Drafters and National Authority Representatives assists States Parties in drafting implementing legislation. The programme enhances the technical skills of the participants to enable them to complete a draft of national implementing legislation.

Periodic regional meetings and the Annual Meeting of National Authorities are valuable opportunities to review and discuss the status of implementation and to offer technical assistance as appropriate. The Mentorship programme facilitates the transfer of best practices between States. The OPCW Technical Secretariat has actively focussed on offering practical on-site assistance tailored to the needs of the States Parties that have requested it.

The international legal framework also offers several avenues for greater cooperation and coordination between international organisations in the context of counter-terrorism. The OPCW's Open-Ended Working Group on Terrorism met in January this year to review such mechanisms and opportunities for enhanced interaction and coordination. The OEWG's Sub-Working Group on Non-State Actors is also examining how we can work with and learn from the experience of other international organisations. The Sub-Working Group's Chairperson, Her Excellency María Teresa Infante, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Chile, will brief the conference on this important work.

Continuing to focus on effective prevention is a prudent and necessary course of action. Unfortunately it is very clear that even as stockpiles of declared chemical weapons diminish, the threat of chemical terrorism remains. An effective response will mean tackling this challenge on two fronts; to enhance preventive measures, but to be fully prepared if the worst were to happen. We work extensively with States Parties to ensure that adequate emergency response capacities are in place in the unfortunate event that the need arises. As part of such preparedness, we have established a Rapid Response and Assistance Mission (RRAM). The RRAM can be deployed upon request from an affected State Party to provide emergency assistance in the case of a chemical weapons attack.

In January, we tested the RRAM at a table-top exercise held in the framework of the UN Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (UNCTITF) at OPCW headquarters. The RRAM is equipped with analytical equipment to detect toxic chemicals, secure the affected area, and provide assistance to victims. Importantly, the team is enabled to cooperate and coordinate with UN and other relevant international organisations. Collective approaches are important; however, the OPCW also works closely with its individual Member States to develop preparedness and response capabilities. This is achieved through comprehensive training and capacity building programmes for first responders and other relevant agencies. Capacity building also involves working closely with scientists and industry around the world to promote peaceful uses of chemistry. To assist States Parties, the Organisation has established a wide range of programmes, including, for instance, the training of young chemists in industrial best practices and the promotion of analytical laboratory skills.

Together, we have made significant progress towards a world free from chemical weapons over the last twenty years. However, recent events demonstrate the urgency of the work left to be done. There have been several recent reports claiming the use of chemical weapons. The conflict in Syria, tragic as it is, has also resulted in a number of instances of use of chemical weapons. As mentioned earlier, the latest reports that another such incident might have occurred in Khan Sheikhoun where scores of civilians tragically lost their lives causes serious concerns and is being enquired into by the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission. You are all aware of the recent fatality reported by Malaysia at Kuala Lumpur International Airport 2.

The Executive Council of the OPCW has expressed its grave concern over this reported incident. The Organisation has offered the government of Malaysia technical assistance in its national investigation of the incident and also provided to them technical materials to assist in this enquiry. Reports on the use of chemical weapons in Mosul, Iraq, are also a source of serious concern. In this case, we are working with the Iraqi authorities and have offered assistance to their investigation.

At a time when the international community is earnestly seeking solutions to longstanding problems associated with disarmament of weapons of mass destruction, our experience at the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) offers useful lessons and insights. The Convention, a major peace dividend from the time the Cold War ended, deals at once with both disarmament and non-proliferation with its clear and comprehensive prohibitions and a track record of major accomplishments.

It was a long historic campaign that resulted in the global and verifiable ban on chemical weapons represented in the Convention, with several earlier international efforts having failed. Today, the Convention stands out as a unique international legal instrument relating to weapons of mass destruction. It is so because of its wide ranging scope and the level of acceptance throughout the world that it enjoys. In a world where many issues divide, the ban against chemical weapons is a uniting theme.. The Convention and the OPCW remain clear examples of the success of multilateralism and what can be accomplished and the benefits of international cooperation.

Our achievements are valuable, but we must remain focused on the future. The threat of chemical weapons remains, and it requires a concrete response by States and international organisations. While we face new challenges, our experience over the last twenty years holds valuable lessons. We must reinforce our determination to build on them for the sake of a safe and peaceful world. I wish you a productive and fruitful conference.

Thank you for your attention.