

## **The European International Model United Nations (TEIMUN) 2014**

### **Opening Remarks by Grace Asirwatham OPCW Deputy Director-General**

**21 July 2014**

Dear students,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure and honour for me to welcome you to TEIMUN 2014.

Looking around me I see the future leaders of the international community.

I see the future of multinational diplomacy.

This year's theme for TEIMUN - "Pursuing Perpetual Peace: Ideals and Interests at War" - is a very fitting one for you as future diplomats.

We must never forget that peace cannot simply be pulled out of a hat by individuals and idealists.

Peace needs practical politicians, capable of nudging the world away from nettlesome conflicts and catastrophes.

Peace needs global institutions, not least the United Nations, with their well-oiled consensus-building structures.

And for the mechanics of peace to function smoothly, we need a healthy working relationship between all of these actors.

Above all, on the road to a more peaceful world, it is important that we tackle the most monstrous weapons first: the weapons of mass destruction.

With this in mind, I would like to start by saying a few words about the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons - the OPCW - and its work to implement the ban on chemical weapons, known as the Chemical Weapons Convention.

The OPCW is a young organisation - it dates back to 1997, when the Chemical Weapons Convention came into effect.

It is a creation of that agreement which has now been signed and ratified by a hundred and ninety countries.

This makes us ten years younger than TEIMUN and just a few years younger than most of you.

But as you know all too well, young does not always mean inexperienced.

In little more than seventeen years, the OPCW has verified the destruction of more than 80 percent of the world's declared chemical weapons.

The Convention has been a uniquely successful treaty in the history of multilateral disarmament.

Not only does it ban outright an entire class of weapons of mass destruction, it polices this ban through international verification.

In other words, the 190 Member States of the Convention must prove they are not hiding or making chemical weapons by opening their chemical production facilities to a rigorous inspection regime.

In doing so by mutual consent, with full transparency, they have built an extraordinary level of trust and confidence between themselves, and in their cooperation with the OPCW.

It is not enough to put agreements on paper. To have any chance of success, international rules must be strictly observed, and compliance must be monitored credibly and transparently.

The fact that the Convention enjoys near universal adherence shows just how important protection against these weapons is to the community of nations.

Throughout the ages, chemical concoctions have been used to poison enemies by armies and agitators alike.

More than two millennia ago, the Persian army used a toxic gas composed of burnt bitumen and sulfur to suffocate their Roman foes.

Their bodies were found piled in a tunnel, still clutching their steel swords.

Over the course of the past century, chemical weapons have suffocated, incapacitated and disfigured countless victims – many of them innocent civilians – with brutal regularity, from the battlefields of Flanders to the suburbs of Damascus.

The chemical attack in Syria just under a year ago showed the world, in gruesome detail, the gut-wrenching nature of chemical weapons.

It is precisely due to this tragic legacy that the international community has been steadfast in its support for the OPCW's mission to forever consign these heinous weapons to history.

Recent months have witnessed what have been truly historic developments for the OPCW.

Our mission in Syria serves as a powerful reminder of how political will and firm commitment can be used to tackle unprecedented challenges.

It is an extraordinary collective effort.

The OPCW deployed a team to Syria less than three days after its Member States agreed to an accelerated destruction programme.

They went over the disclosures made by the Syrian government, presented timelines for inspectors and pieced together logistical plans.

This group was then followed by other specialists – chemists, engineers and munitions experts.

A lot of this work was done under very dangerous conditions and within extremely constricted timeframes.

It is worth remembering that these brave volunteers did work, in the middle of a vicious conflict that has taken years to accomplish in peace elsewhere.

This brings us up to where we are today.

A few weeks ago we completed the removal of chemicals from Syria, a crucial milestone in the programme to eliminate that country's chemical weapons.

This milestone brings us even closer to our goal of achieving a world free of chemical weapons; a goal that is now very much within our grasp.

I am pleased to say that our hard work over the years has not gone unnoticed.

The award of the Nobel Peace Prize to the OPCW last year has dramatically increased the visibility of our organisation and the cause of chemical disarmament.

Of course, our achievements are by no means limited to the destruction of existing chemical weapons.

Beyond disarmament and non-proliferation, we have developed extensive measures to guard against their re-emergence in the future.

We have set up mechanisms and training for enhancing our members' ability to fulfill their obligations under the Convention, as well as to protect themselves against the impact of chemical attacks and accidents.

We are also promoting cooperation on peaceful uses of chemistry.

In short, the OPCW is working not only to prevent chemistry from being misused to harm humankind, but also to ensure that it benefits humankind to the greatest extent possible.

While Syria continues to be the focus of our efforts at present, the OPCW has not lost sight of the wider strategic context of our work – and of new challenges ahead.

These include persuading those six countries still outside the Convention – Angola, Egypt, Israel, Myanmar, North Korea and South Sudan – to join without delay and without conditions.

No country can make a valid case for remaining outside a treaty that protects its citizens against chemical weapons and delivers clear benefits to its economy – especially in the face of international reaction to the barbarous use of chemical weapons in Syria.

At the same time, we need to be responsive to a rapidly changing strategic environment with dramatic advances in technology and communications.

This is something that your generation understands better than most.

In your young lives, you have seen dizzying change; from Twitter to Tumblr to terror attacks and global economic turmoil.

In the field of chemical disarmament, these changes pose new challenges for how we protect sensitive materials and technologies against misuse, without curtailing access to their beneficial applications.

This is no longer just a case of preventing transfers of chemical weapons-relevant materials to states unwilling to comply with international norms.

The rise of international terrorism has heightened proliferation risks in ways that current non-proliferation regimes are ill-equipped to address.

We will need to be more alert to this threat – and more imaginative in how we deal with it.

Finally, while the definition of what constitutes a chemical weapon under the Convention is very clear, it is possible that new technologies will challenge our ability to recognise when developments in chemistry might be used for malicious purposes.

Think back to the chlorine gas that poisoned hundreds of thousands of soldiers on the battlefield of Ypres a century ago, some of them perhaps your great-grandfathers.

And through knowledge gained in research on insecticides, chemists in the 1930s invented modern nerve agents – much deadlier chemicals than the original insecticides that inspired them.

We need, therefore, to ensure we have strong partnerships in place and the right tools at our disposal to monitor and assess such technologies.

This is why, despite being an independent international organisation, we very much value our close working relationship with the UN.

This stands to reason, since our activities make an important contribution to the UN's responsibility for maintaining peace and security, in accordance with the UN Charter, as well as relevant UN resolutions.

This includes placing our resources at the disposal of the Secretary-General for investigating alleged uses of chemical weapons involving states outside the Chemical Weapons Convention.

This was the case in Syria last year.

Among its findings, the UN investigation – to which the OPCW provided crucial expertise – confirmed the use of sarin in the chemical attack in Syria that I mentioned earlier.

Following Syria's move to accede to the Convention, the OPCW combined forces with the UN to establish the Joint Mission to oversee the removal and destruction of Syrian chemical weapons.

Creating awareness of our work is also of key importance to us.

This is why we set great store by unrolling materials for awareness-raising, education and outreach purposes, some of which are already available on the OPCW website.

Clearly, the history of chemical disarmament presents several interesting lessons for multilateral diplomats – present and future.

But one which I would invite you to especially consider is how technical expertise and knowledge can be married with political savvy to come up with multilateral solutions that produce practical results.

Your generation of diplomats will need to make special efforts to engage an ever broader set of stakeholders in international peace and security.

This will require you to have not only excellent communication skills, but also a well-anchored world view and broad strategic perspectives.

You will need to find a common language and common objectives with scientists and industry representatives, no less than with government officials and policy-makers.

You will need to guard yourself against cynicism..

There were many who had condemned our Syria mission to failure even before our inspectors set foot on Syrian territory.

And yet we proved the cynics wrong.

You will also need patience.

I can tell you this now – multilateral negotiations are hard work.

They rarely have momentous breakthroughs. And they often get bogged down in detail.

For example, the Chemical Weapons Convention was the result of twenty years of arduous negotiations, preceded by less robust instruments dating back to the 1899 Hague Convention.

The Convention was finally opened to signature at a conference after delegates reached an agreement at four o'clock in the morning on a cold January day in Paris.

But do not let this put you off.

It is precisely because they must accommodate the interests of all participating states that the outcomes of negotiations are so enduring.

When we engage in such negotiations, as you will over coming days, we should always look to temper our ambition with realism – but a realism that never loses sight of shared ideals.

Such ideals are only too apparent in the field of peace and security – the Chemical Weapons Convention is living proof of this.

With that, allow me to wish you well in your endeavours as you familiarise yourself with the ins-and-outs of multilateral diplomacy at this excellent forum.

And don't worry, not all negotiations last until 4am.

Thank you.