

THIMUN 2014
Statement by Deputy Director-General

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you to THIMUN 2014.

As you all know, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) works to implement the global ban on chemical weapons, known as the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Some of my colleagues will be briefing you in more detail about our work, including with hands-on demonstrations of our inspection equipment. But let me make a few points here.

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.

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

For the horrific impact of chemical weapons has been only too apparent over the course of the past century. They have suffocated, incapacitated and disfigured countless victims – many innocent civilians – with brutal regularity, from the battlefields of Flanders, to the suburbs of Damascus.

The international community has been steadfast in its support for the OPCW's mission in forever consigning these heinous weapons to history. As a result, we have been able to record astonishing achievements since the Convention entered into force in 1997.

In little more than sixteen years, the OPCW has verified the destruction of more than 82 per cent of the world's declared chemical weapons – and we are well on the way to dispatching remaining stocks. We have also developed extensive measures to guard against their re-emergence in the future.

Beyond disarmament and non-proliferation, 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.

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

The mission currently underway in Syria presents a unique opportunity to rid the world of a major chemical weapons arsenal. Its successful completion will bring us within ever closer reach of making the vision of a world free of chemical weapons a reality.

At the same time, the award of the 2013 Nobel Peace Prize has served to dramatically increase the visibility of the OPCW and the cause of chemical disarmament.

This has not only enhanced our energy and enthusiasm for the tasks at hand – it has also fuelled our hope that the OPCW's record of success might add impetus to disarmament efforts further afield.

While Syria is rightly focusing 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. Growing economic interdependence and dramatic advances in technology and communications are posing 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 intended for harm. We need, therefore, to

ensure we have the right tools and partnerships in place to monitor and assess such technologies, as well as recourse to the possibility of broadening our reach.

The OPCW is an independent international organisation, but we enjoy a 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 use of chemical weapons involving states outside the Chemical Weapons Convention.

This was recently the case in Syria. Among its findings, the UN investigation – to which the OPCW provided crucial expertise – confirmed the use of sarin in the Damascus suburb of Ghouta last August.

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. This mission has further thrust our cooperation into the international limelight.

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

But one on which I would invite you to especially consider is how technical expertise and knowledge can be married with policy making nous and skills to come up with multilateral solutions that yield 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 worldview 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 also need patience, for multilateral negotiations are hard work. They rarely have momentous breakthroughs. And they often get bogged down in detail.

But because they must accommodate the interests of all participating states, their outcomes are 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.

Thank you.