



ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

**Special event commemorating the 20th anniversary of the entry into force
of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC)**

Opening remarks by Ambassador Hamid Ali Rao, Deputy Director-General, OPCW

31 May 2017

Zagreb, Croatia

REMARKS AS DELIVERED

President Muharemi (Croatian National Commission),

Ambassador Gustović-Ercegovac (Ambassador of the Republic of Croatia to the Kingdom of the Netherlands),

Professor Čižmešija (Dean of Faculty of Science of University of Zagreb),

Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour to participate in this special event commemorating the 20th anniversary of the entry into force of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and the founding of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

On behalf of the OPCW Director-General and on my own behalf, I wish to express my appreciation to the Croatian National Commission and the University of Zagreb for hosting this event.

This important milestone is also shared by Croatia's national authority.

The National Commission's twentieth year in operation serves to highlight your country's exemplary dedication to the noble goals enshrined in the CWC and the importance Croatian authorities attach to ensuring its effective implementation.

Croatia has been a key partner in supporting the work of the OPCW over the years.

With Croatia's excellent track record in academia, chemical research and industry, our cooperation has extended to these important fields and beyond.

Croatia has been regularly hosting and contributing to international cooperation, assistance and protection events.

And I wish to note a very special partnership that exists between the OPCW and the Regional Arms Control Verification and Implementation Assistance Centre (RACVIAC).

The OPCW looks forward to further strengthening this cooperation and engaging your experts along the main pillars of our work.

Twenty years ago, the Chemical Weapons Convention entered into force when the sixty-fifth State Party deposited its instrument of ratification. Today, 192 nations are States Parties to the Convention.

Since 1997, our Member States have been working tirelessly to ensure the treaty's successful implementation, nationally, regionally and globally.

To date, the OPCW has verified the destruction of tens of thousands of tonnes of chemical warfare agents. Today, thanks to the CWC, over 95 percent of declared chemical weapons stockpiles are gone, along with the facilities required for their production. We are well on track to ensure that the remaining stockpiles are destroyed as soon as possible.

At the same time, we continue to oversee the CWC's industry verification system, which stands at the heart of the trust and confidence our States Parties place in the treaty's assurances.

As you all know, in recognition of the Organisation's work to safeguard the world against the threat of chemical weapons, the OPCW was awarded the 2013 Nobel Peace Prize. This achievement has raised awareness about the important mission of the OPCW, and the tireless work of our staff and States Parties in the service of peace and security.

It has also served to inspire us as we confront a series of challenges to the norm we have worked so hard to build.

Never has our resilience been more severely tested than in Syria. Despite an ongoing civil war, our Organisation has overseen an ambitious chemical demilitarisation programme that tested the limits of our Convention and underscored the will of our States Parties to see it deal successfully with one of the greatest challenges it has faced.

Our work there has not yet finished. Through the work of our Fact-Finding Mission and our cooperation with the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism, we are playing our part to ensure accountability for the use of chemical weapons.

As we reflect on the challenges that we have overcome and that we continue to face, we are also using the opportunity provided by our 20th anniversary to look ahead. And what we can see is that our environment is changing.

The rising threat of non-state actors, the pace of economic development, and the evolution of science and technology are all shaping the future of our Organisation and of our treaty.

We must be prepared to respond to these changes, to start shifting our focus to preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons, and to adjust our resources and programmes when the need arises.

What is clear is that the CWC's verification regime will remain a cornerstone of our work. But effectively rising to the challenges ahead will require a more holistic approach to treaty implementation.

The threat posed by non-state actors' ability to access and deploy toxic chemicals will continue to test us.

Even in the face of this diffuse and menacing threat, the full implementation of the Convention remains the first line of defence.

It is our vital objective to ensure that all States Parties continue to make steady progress towards this goal, including by firmly prescribing the CWC provisions in their domestic legislation.

At the same time, it remains of paramount importance that the international community works together to counter this grave threat.

To that end, the OPCW continues to encourage even greater cooperation among Member States in areas of common interest such as prohibitions in national legislation, chemical security, and border controls.

And we are working to develop our capacity to help coordinate this vital work, to share best practices and to provide assistance where we can.

To help our States Parties should the worst occur, the OPCW has established a Rapid Response and Assistance Mission (RRAM). Upon request, the RRAM provides States Parties with critical emergency assistance in cases of the use of chemical weapons.

Of course, preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons also requires the engagement of a range of stakeholders from across our societies. To that end, the OPCW is working to expand its education and outreach efforts to an ever-wider audience that includes international organisations, academia, scientific and technological communities and civil society.

Our aim in this endeavour is to bolster the international norm against chemical weapons by creating awareness about our important work, disseminating knowledge and best practices, and building productive partnerships.

The Organisation has also been working to build closer ties with representatives of the global chemical industry. Such cooperation is truly unprecedented in the history of disarmament and we will continue to expand our collaborative ties with industry professionals around the world.

In our work with chemical industry representatives, the OPCW is no longer only seen as an auditor and regulator, but instead as a partner, sharing a common goal.

The expansion of the global trade in chemicals makes this partnership more important than ever. Collaboration and transparency in ensuring that toxic chemicals do not fall into the wrong hands is essential for preserving chemical security, and ensuring the use of chemical science towards peaceful ends.

As we strengthen our ties with industry, we will also continue to invest in improving capacities and raising safety and security standards across our Member States.

Our assistance and protection procedures and international cooperation programmes facilitate capacity building and national implementation, and promote good practices in chemical manufacturing and safety. To date, nearly 5,000 people have participated in programmes relating to peaceful uses of chemistry.

In this, as in all our work, we will remain committed to the principles of cooperation and consensus that have been the true hallmarks of our success.

The Convention and the work of the OPCW represent the most effective bulwark against the cruelty of chemical weapons, in whatever form they take and whoever seeks to use them.

As we mark this 20th anniversary, let us rededicate ourselves to preserving the norms of the Convention and ensuring its longevity in the years ahead.

Let us pay homage to the memory of the victims of chemical weapons across the world, and in their memory, let us spare no effort to ensure that such tragedies never happen again.

As we look forward, let us acknowledge that the success of the OPCW is owed to the commitment of its Member States and the participation of all of its stakeholders.

Finally, let us continue this collective endeavour – working together for a world truly free of chemical weapons, forever.

Thank you.