

**Keynote Address**  
**OPCW Conference on Countering Chemical Terrorism**  
**The Hague, 7 June 2018**  
**Executive Director Europol Ms Catherine De Bolle**

**Introduction**

Director-General, Ambassadors, distinguished delegates,

Good morning.

I would like to start by thanking the Director-General for inviting me to address the conference this morning.

I am at the beginning of my second month in charge of Europol, the EU law enforcement agency, whose headquarters are just across the road.

It is always important to have good relations with your neighbours, especially when you have just moved in!

More importantly, the OPCW and Europol have important interests in common. These will be the focus of my speech today.

**'The Ieper Room'**

Before doing so, let me point out that we are gathered in the Ieper Room, named after the Belgian town of Ieper – not far from where I grew up.

Ieper witnessed the first use of industrial chemical weapons, in 1915, on the Western Front during the Great War.

In recent times, chemical weapons have not been used in Europe but we are all aware of the fact that they have been deployed in Syria on several occasions during the current conflict.

Nevertheless I would like to congratulate the Director-General and all his staff for their tireless efforts to investigate these incidents, while, at the same time, working towards the effective prohibition of such weapons worldwide.

These efforts were rightly recognised with the award of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2013.

### **From state actors to non-state actors**

Historically, the focus on your Organisation has been chemical weapons developed and deployed as part of state arsenals.

But today's conference focuses on an emerging threat which is of particular interest to both the OPCW and Europol.

I refer to the risk of terrorists obtaining, and using, chemical weapons.

Responding to this threat is a task which involves many different national and international actors.

Within this field, the task of Europol and the law enforcement community is to monitor, disrupt and apprehend the criminals and terrorists, who might traffic or use those substances.

As the recent incident in the United Kingdom demonstrated, relatively small amounts of certain substances can have tragic consequences.

Investigating such incidents requires very high levels of expertise, which are not available to many police forces.

So, cooperation between different parts of government, and across borders, is necessary.

Another concern is the difficulty of policing conflict zones, or regions where there has been a breakdown in the rule of law.

Particular attention must be paid to people and goods moving from these places to Europe and other parts of the world.

Again, this requires the sharing of knowledge and expertise across sectors and across borders.

### **Global nature of modern threats**

I mentioned Ieper earlier, but of course the wider context is very different today.

We are dealing with very complex threats, which reflect wider socio-economic developments.

The most obvious examples are the ease of travel and transportation, the internet and telecommunications.

Criminals and terrorists exploit the relative ease of transportation, and use globalised instruments like the internet, to cause greater harm.

In the criminal sphere, we see a trend towards 'professionalization', or 'crime as a service'.

This means that highly specialised people are offering their services for sale to criminals and terrorists.

Illicit goods and services are increasingly traded online, including on the Darknet.

Meanwhile, complex financial flows allow illegal actors to conceal their true identity when purchasing goods or when investing profits.

These trends make it increasingly difficult to draw the line between criminality and terrorism, and between 'state' and 'non-state' actors.

### **Developments in law enforcement response - Europol**

From a policing perspective, we need to work closely together, more than ever before.

At Europol we focus on supporting the exchange of intelligence and the coordination of joint operational activities.

Europol has a special role in supporting the national law enforcement authorities across Europe and beyond, thanks to our cooperation agreements with countries including Australia, Canada, Colombia and the United States.

The globalisation of crime is reflected in greater international police cooperation.

We are collecting more data and intelligence than ever before.

Over a million messages were exchanged via our network in 2017, compared to 600,000 three years ago.

And the number of cases in our systems has doubled in last three years.

The growth of Europol is not just about numbers.

The sophistication and sensitivity of operations have also increased.

### **Counter-Terrorism**

The level of counter-terrorist cooperation through Europol has increased dramatically since the major attacks in France and Belgium in 2015 and 2016.

In January 2016, Europol launched the European Counter-Terrorism Centre, which now counts about 70 officers.

Their focus is supporting national counter-terrorist investigations.

We have a particular focus on the several thousand 'foreign terrorist fighters' who left Europe to fight in Syria and Iraq earlier in the conflict.

In 2015, we also launched the EU Internet Referral Unit, which works with online service providers to identify and remove jihadist propaganda from social media networks.

This effort has already had a real impact on the capacity of Islamic State to spread hate.

Terrorists increasingly have to use smaller online networks with limited reach, because the major companies have become much more effective in removing illegal content.

As well as casework, training is also an important topic. Europol promotes, organises and supports trainings for CBRN experts.

Europol actively supports a law enforcement CBRN expert working group and hosts an online platform, the Europol Platform for Experts.

This platform enables more than 300 European bomb technicians and CBRN experts to swiftly and directly share knowledge, best practices and technical information on recent cases and incidents.

The bomb-making process, potential explosive recipes, and potential new threats using CBRN materials, are monitored daily and cross-checked by Europol's experts.

Information is shared with experts and relevant units at national level.

There may be opportunities for cooperation with OPCW, because police and OPCW experts deal with similar scenarios involving the use of Personal Protective Equipment, detection equipment and procedures to collect highly toxic substances.

We are also monitoring the evolution of terrorist threats and providing advice to Ministers, Police Chiefs and EU Institutions about the implications for protecting European citizens.

On 20 June we will launch our annual Terrorism Situation and Trend Report, or TESAT. This is a public report and I encourage you to read it!

## **Terrorist Use of Chemical Weapons**

At the present time, we do not see evidence of chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear (CBRN) weaponry being used by terrorists in the EU.

However we are aware of one plot that was disrupted in Australia last year.

And there have been several indications of jihadist terrorists taking an active interest in the possibilities of chemical attacks.

In particular, several jihadist media outlets used social media channels to release knowledge about chemical weapons and related terror tactics in 2017.

They proposed simple methods to allow untrained individuals, even lone actors, to put in practice attacks with CBRN materials.

By suggesting simple methods, terrorist organisations make CBRN attacks more accessible, even to radicalised individuals without scientific knowledge or experience.

This shows why our work against terrorist propaganda is so important.

Even the slightest threat must be taken very seriously, given that jihadist groups can be found in the same conflict zones as chemical stockpiles, which may not be properly managed.

## **Conclusion**

We therefore welcome the increased focus of the OPCW on preventing terrorists from obtaining chemical weapons.

This conference could not come at a better time.

I wish you fruitful discussions and continued success in working towards a world free of chemical weapons.

Thank you.