

**Conference Remarks by
Ambassador Ahmet Üzümcü, Director-General OPCW**

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Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to have this opportunity to address such a distinguished audience on the occasion of my visit to Montevideo. I wish at the outset to express my sincere appreciation to the National Authority of Uruguay and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the warm hospitality and excellent arrangements accorded to me during the visit.

The Government of Uruguay has been offering invaluable support to the work of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and I highly appreciate your country's commitment to achieve full and effective implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC).

Steady progress continues to be made in the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention in Uruguay and Latin America. I look forward to continuing this important collaboration towards realising our joint vision of a world free from chemical weapons

The Chemical Weapons Convention has been in operation for nearly seventeen years. This is by no means a lengthy history for a disarmament regime. However, we have witnessed significant progress in our efforts to eliminate an entire class of weapons of mass destruction and establish a global norm against such weapons.

Today, 190 countries subscribe to the Convention and over 80% of declared chemical weapons have already been destroyed under strict international verification.

With the current mission to eliminate Syria's chemical weapons we are further advancing our vision of complete global chemical disarmament.

Verification regime for the elimination of chemical weapons remains an important task. But the scope of the Convention is more far-reaching than that.

The Chemical Weapons Convention provides a strong foundation for comprehensive disarmament and non-proliferation, a regime that bans chemical weapons and prevents their re-emergence. It also establishes a global norm for enhancing chemical safety and security and the promotion of peaceful uses of chemistry.

The success of the Convention has reinforced our confidence in multilateralism and has opened up new prospects for disarmament endeavours in the future.

I wish to therefore briefly touch upon some of the highlights of our work to date as well as those elements that will continue to shape our work in the years ahead.

The conclusion of the CWC in 1992 was a result of dedicated work spanning nearly a century of diplomatic negotiations and concerted efforts. The earliest initiatives to control or prohibit the use of poisonous weapons included the St. Petersburg Declaration of 1868 and The Hague Declaration of 1899. Yet the objectives of these instruments remained unfulfilled.

The emergence of chemical weapons as weapons of mass destruction during the First World War led to the adoption of the Geneva Protocol in 1925. While prohibiting the use of chemical and biological weapons, the Geneva Protocol did not prohibit their production, development or stockpiling. This incomplete ban allowed countries to produce vast quantities of chemical weapons.

Unfortunately, these weapons were used: in the 1980's by the former regime in Iraq in its war against Iran, and against its own people in Halabja, as well as in the 1990's by a terrorist group in Japan.

Against this tragic backdrop, the entry into force of the CWC in 1997 represented an invaluable breakthrough in the international community's long-standing efforts to comprehensively ban chemical weapons.

Even today, the Convention is the only multilateral treaty of its kind that represents a total ban on an entire category of weapons of mass destruction under strict international verification.

The progress achieved in the implementation of the Convention has been indeed remarkable in pace and scope. With near-universal adherence, the Convention now covers over 98% of the world's population and chemical industry. No other disarmament treaty has attracted such wide adherence at such rapid pace.

On the disarmament front, the OPCW has verified the destruction of some 82%, of all chemical weapons stocks declared by eight Member States, including Syria.

The two major possessor states, the Russian Federation and the United States, are well on track to achieving their destruction targets, in accordance with a revised decision adopted by our Member States in 2011. Three others – Albania, India and another State Party that has requested anonymity – have completed destruction of their stockpiles.

The few remaining possessor states are moving quickly to complete destruction.

Libya has completed destruction of its chemical weapons stocks, with mainly component chemicals left to be eliminated, and Iraq is proceeding with a plan to destroy remnants of chemical weapons on its territory.

Under the Convention, States Parties also have an obligation to declare and destroy facilities that have produced chemical weapons. Out of the 96 such facilities declared by States Parties, 43 have already been destroyed and 23 have been converted for peaceful purposes. As a result, chemical weapons production capacity has been completely eliminated for 90% of all declared production facilities.

Ensuring non re-emergence of chemical weapons is a second, fundamental and long-term core objective of the Convention. For that purpose, together with its disarmament activities, the OPCW conducts year-round inspections of industrial facilities that produce toxic chemicals and precursors.

The successful establishment in a relatively short period of time of an effective verification regime is a crucial and noteworthy accomplishment.

Every year the Organisation conducts over 240 industry inspections in around 80 countries. On any given day, somewhere

in the world the chemical industry is likely being inspected by the OPCW.

In addition to fulfilling this mandate, the OPCW continues to make major contributions to strengthening capacity for providing assistance and protection against chemical weapons.

The Technical Secretariat organises training programmes for first responders and other relevant government experts to develop national and regional capabilities and emergency response systems against the use, or threat of use, of chemical weapons.

On top of this the OPCW also helps to build national and regional capacities that have a beneficial economic impact for recipient countries. For instance, the OPCW trains chemists and engineers in industrial best practices to safely manage chemicals in a complex industrial environment. We have programmes designed to enhance analytical skills in chemistry. Other programmes provide funding for research projects and organise internships for qualified people at world-class research institutions. These activities have promoted a sense of ownership and solidarity among our States Parties, especially among developing countries and those with economies in transition.

Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Last year the OPCW embarked on an unprecedented, historic mission to destroy one of the worlds' remaining chemical weapons arsenals under very difficult circumstances.

Even before the OPCW commenced its work in Syria, that tragic conflict presented a seemingly insurmountable challenge for

international efforts to broker a peaceful resolution for almost three years.

But the shocking sarin attacks in the Damascus suburb of Ghouta last August – confirmed by a UN investigation to which the OPCW contributed crucial expertise – changed this.

For the first time since the conflict began, the international community was able to reach unanimous agreement on one aspect in relation to the crisis – namely, that Syrian chemical weapons must be eliminated.

Russia and the United States played a pivotal role in this regard, following Syria's move to join the Chemical Weapons Convention on 14 September. Their Framework Agreement paved the way for a historic decision by the OPCW's Executive Council on 27 September on an accelerated programme for eliminating Syrian chemical weapons by mid-2014. This decision was endorsed that same day by unanimous adoption of UN Security Council 2118.

The OPCW was quick off the mark in implementing this programme. The first team of inspectors arrived in Damascus on 1 October, and the OPCW-UN Joint Mission in Syria was established soon after 16 October.

The mission recorded several early successes ahead of set target dates, including submission by Syria of a complete declaration of its chemical weapon stocks and sites, the destruction of all unfilled chemical weapon munitions, and the functional destruction of production facilities.

What this means is that Syria is no longer able to produce chemical weapons – a significant milestone that was reached only one month after the Executive Council's 27 September decision.

The next milestones, however, present challenges of a much greater magnitude.

The Executive Council of the OPCW moved quickly to agree detailed requirements for the destruction programme in a decision taken on 15 November. This key decision calls for the removal of all chemical weapons from Syria for destruction outside the country.

The Council decision required putting into place complex arrangements for the transportation and destruction of Syrian chemical weapons and unprecedented levels of international support and coordination.

Under a transportation and destruction plan supporting the Council decision and the OPCW's Syria Trust Fund, Denmark and Norway are providing cargo vessels. Russia, China and the United Kingdom provide military escorts for the transportation of the chemicals.

Mustard agent and priority chemicals will be transported to the Italian port of Gioia Tauro for trans-loading to a US vessel, the MV Cape Ray, for destruction at sea. This will involve a process of hydrolysis - breaking down chemical agents with hot water and a caustic compound. The resulting effluent will be stored on board the Cape Ray before being transported to other destinations for disposal.

Some of the priority chemicals will be transported to the United Kingdom for disposal at commercial facilities in that country. Germany has so far offered to receive effluent resulting from destruction of mustard agent for disposal on its territory.

All other chemicals – largely industrial toxic chemicals – will be treated and disposed of by commercial companies.

There have been well-publicised delays in Syrian shipments of chemicals to the port of Latakia, where they are being loaded onto the Danish and Norwegian vessels. These delays have been due to a variety of reasons, including the security situation.

Half of all chemicals have now have been moved out of the country. If the Syrian authorities hold to their revised timetable of removing all chemicals by 13 April – and some additional chemicals from currently inaccessible sites by 27 April – we consider that the mid-2014 deadline for destruction could still be met.

It is my sincere hope that by achieving Syria's full chemical disarmament the OPCW will contribute to the efforts in search for a political solution to the conflict in Syria. It is also my hope that the success of this mission will further strengthen our cause to achieve universal adherence to the CWC to ensure that such tragedies never happen again.

The mission in Syria has indeed required the dedication of significant resources and efforts. However, we have remained aware of the wider strategic context of our work – and of new challenges ahead.

The tragic use of chemical weapons in Syria has yet again reminded us that this threat will continue to haunt us as long as there will be countries that have not subscribed to the norm of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

In this regard, we will spare no effort in continuing our engagements with the remaining six States not Party, with a view to achieving their accession or ratification without delay or preconditions. These six are South Sudan, Angola, Egypt, Israel, Myanmar and North Korea.

The CWC represents a universal norm that is widely accepted by the vast majority of the international community. There is no reason why any State should abstain from this basic principle. Chemical weapons can have no justification under any circumstances.

With the verified elimination of the declared chemical weapons stockpiles in sight, the Organisation's future priorities will shift towards ensuring that the Convention remains a permanent barrier against chemical weapons. The Syrian mission commenced at a time of transition and change for the OPCW, and in this regard it has emphasised even more the necessity for the OPCW to maintain its institutional capacity to deal with similar challenges in the future.

One of future priorities will be related to ensuring refinement and adequacy of the industry verification regime, given the large number of industrial facilities that have been declared to the OPCW.

Industry has been a vital partner for the OPCW. Without enjoying the full confidence of industry, there can be no effective means of inspecting commercial chemical production facilities to ensure that they are engaged in exclusively peaceful activities.

To deal with these matters effectively, it will be necessary to maintain and enhance the knowledge and expertise of the

organisation in the field of verification and improve its mechanisms in accordance with the requirements of the changing environment.

At the same time, we need to retain our ability to detect new chemicals and the impact they can have on the Convention. This will allow channelling chemical research, scientific and technological advances exclusively towards peaceful ends.

In this regard, the OPCW Scientific Advisory Board will continue to play a key role. It continually reviews scientific and technological developments on the basis of their potential impact on the Convention. Board members provide independent advice, drawing also on their own extensive networks to test thoroughly assessments shared with the OPCW.

Chemical safety and security is assuming an increasing relevance in the work of the OPCW. Preventing the misuse of toxic chemicals is an important element in the context of the non-proliferation and the prevention of the re-emergence of chemical weapons.

The threat from non-State actors, particularly terrorists, seeking to produce or acquire chemical weapons is another challenge. The most effective defence against such threats are measures to deny non-State actors access to chemicals of concern and the means to produce them.

A more engaged and aware civil society would undoubtedly contribute to reducing risks and improving security. The OPCW will continue to promote the highest ethical standards among scientific communities, NGO's, academia and other relevant stakeholders. With the cooperation of Member States, we will be unrolling tools and materials for awareness-raising, education and

outreach purposes, some of which have already been put into practice and have yielded good results.

There is no doubt that many of these norms can only be upheld through effective national implementation of the Convention. All States Parties must establish and reinforce administrative and legislative measures so that key provisions of the Convention are in place within their jurisdictions.

Full implementation of the Convention by all States Parties, working together in all regions and with all stakeholders, is an essential means to address all these threats.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have highlighted to you some of our major achievements to date as well as important challenges we expect to face in the future.

The convention is a unique instrument; its success depends more than ever on our ability to work together and bring together all relevant stakeholders from government authorities - to civil society, academia, NGO's and others.

In recognition of our achievements and efforts in building a world free of chemical weapons we could not have wished for a more prestigious acknowledgement than the Nobel Peace Prize – a singular honour awarded to the Organization in 2013. This decision by the Nobel Committee embodied an acknowledgement of OPCW's extensive efforts to achieve a world free of chemical weapons – a vision that has finally come within our reach.

The mission in Syria has illustrated that only by joining our efforts can we succeed and ensure lasting success for the CWC well into the future.

In 2015 we will be joining the international community to mark the centenary of the first use of chemical weapons. Keeping in mind the challenges and the uncertainties the future may bring, we will spare no efforts to ensure that the use of chemical weapons is forever confined to history.

The Chemical Weapons Convention has set a high bar for new endeavours in disarmament. Most importantly, it has shown that multilateralism can deliver practical disarmament success, and I am confident it will continue to do so again.

This strong tradition of cooperation and consensus that exists at the OPCW generates a positive outlook for a challenging future that will test the prohibitions and prescriptions of the Convention in an environment of continual advancements and change.

The unique experience of the OPCW in creating this excellent multilateral cooperative environment promises to be our greatest asset as we look to our future challenges.

The results of our commitment and dedication serve a truly worthy cause – to make our world completely free of chemical weapons.

Thank you.