



ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

Chemical Safety and Security Management Workshop

for North Africa, Middle East and Gulf Sub-Regions

Opening Remarks by Director-General Ahmet Üzümcü

Nicosia, Republic of Cyprus

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REMARKS AS DELIVERED

H.E. Ambassador Zenon, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs,
Excellencies,
Distinguished participants,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to be here today on the occasion of this Chemical Safety and Security Management Workshop. At the outset, I wish to thank the Republic of Cyprus and its National Authority for hosting this event, and for the excellent arrangements and warm hospitality extended to participants.

I also wish to express my appreciation to the Permanent Representation of Cyprus to the OPCW for its support, and to the European Union for funding this workshop. The OPCW is delighted to offer this workshop for the first time in Arabic for representatives from North Africa and the Middle East.

Chemical safety and security is rapidly becoming a priority area for OPCW activities aimed at enhancing implementation of Article XI of the Convention. These activities play an important role in supporting peaceful use of chemicals in the context of sustainable industrial development.

To date, the OPCW has conducted some 36 training activities on chemical safety and security. More than 1,300 representatives of our Member States have attended and benefited from these activities.

Seminars organised by the OPCW provide a platform for States Parties to discuss a wide range of safety and security management issues – including safety processes, risk management,

security and vulnerability assessments, hazardous waste management and responsible care. All of these issues have a direct bearing on effective implementation of the CWC.

The opportunity to do this in Arabic at this workshop, with such broad representation, will help strengthen regional cooperation in this key area by providing a forum for sharing experiences and exchanging best practices on practical implementation of safety and security standards and mechanisms.

Further, this workshop will allow you to address current and emerging challenges for enhancing chemical safety and security standards, and to possibly come up with common solutions for them. For its part, the OPCW stands ready to offer every assistance to its Member States, based on the expertise it can bring to bear and its expanding interaction with chemical industry across the globe.

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Ladies and gentlemen,

For close to twenty years now, the OPCW has overseen the elimination of thousands of tonnes of chemical weapons under the Chemical Weapons Convention. Indeed, it was for these efforts that our organisation was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2013 – something we are immensely proud of.

More recently, we have been able to prove how effective the global chemical disarmament regime can be in the most adverse circumstances – and how relevant it remains. Amidst the brutal conflict in Syria, a large chemical arsenal was removed and destroyed in less than one year after Syria's decision to join the Chemical Weapons Convention in September 2013.

This comprised more than 1,000 tonnes of sulfur mustard and precursor chemicals used for the production of deadly nerve agents, such as sarin. This unprecedented mission came about because of a collective effort involving more than thirty of our Member States and the United Nations – some aspects of it were coordinated from here in Cyprus.

Its urgency was driven by the horrific use of sarin against innocent civilians in the Damascus suburb of Ghouta. The success of this extraordinary mission has by no means been an isolated one – it flows into tangible results the OPCW has achieved elsewhere.

92% of the world's declared chemical weapons have now been destroyed – largely in Russia and the United States – and the remainder will be destroyed within the next seven years. Yet, as impressive as these achievements are, they do not represent the full extent of the work of the OPCW.

For disarmament is about more than getting rid of weapons – it is about making sure they are never again developed or used. And, in the case of chemical weapons, it is about making sure any chemicals – including freely traded industrial ones – are not used as weapons.

The ongoing use of chemical weapons in Syria and in Iraq – both chlorine gas and sulfur mustard – is clearly cause for serious concern. This is an enormous task which the OPCW is grappling with, particularly as our focus shifts from destruction of chemical weapons to preventing their re-emergence. Amid the new reality of chemical terrorism, this is a first-order priority for the OPCW.

Enhancing the safety and security of chemicals is, of course, fundamental to efforts in this area. Given that nearly all the world's countries are members of our organisation, we have a unique competitive advantage in promoting such efforts. The OPCW Secretariat has prepared discussion papers on legal aspects, prosecution and response in regard to chemical terrorism. These issues are being addressed by the Open-ended Working Group on Terrorism (OEWG).

Rapid globalisation of the chemical industry over recent years has only increased the urgency for more effective measures. For there is one notion that the chemical industry – be they large multinationals, or small to medium-sized enterprises – shares in common worldwide. Chemical safety and security is good for business.

From Bhopal to Tianjin, we have seen the enormous human and environmental costs that chemical accidents can have. But imagine such costs multiplied by the hostile actions of terrorist groups. Preventing this sort of contingency – raising the bar against accidents as well as terrorist attacks – is a responsibility shared by governments and industry.

Officials, such as yourselves, will have a key role in providing guidance to industry in the form of effective regulations – regulations that foster economic development while holding to the highest standards of safety and security. A key message of this workshop will be that, working together with industry, we can make meaningful and effective investments in sustainable security practices.

This workshop will be one such investment. It will include the opportunity to interact with internationally recognised experts and to extend your professional networks.

Additionally, the workshop will allow you to compare notes on ways of minimising the risk of chemical accidents and attacks based on the practical experience of participants – and to explore common approaches. You will also be able to discuss awareness raising aimed at fostering a broadly based safety and security culture.

Finally, the workshop will demonstrate the value of training and scientific exchanges for the purposes of informing Member States' development risk assessment and mitigation measures based on their specific individual requirements.

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Distinguished participants,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is the success of workshops such as this that strengthens the very bedrock of the Chemical Weapons Convention. For it is only by protecting ourselves against chemical attacks or accidents that we can unleash the full potential of the benefits that chemistry brings to our daily lives.

In this regard, destruction of existing stocks of chemical weapons will by no means be the final chapter of the OPCW's mission. Our goal must be to ensure that chemistry is always used exclusively for peaceful purposes, as enshrined in the Chemical Weapons Convention.

This will require engagement with a broadening community of partners. For defending against the misuse of chemicals relies on more than a set of rules and regulations. It requires a high degree of awareness, a shared vision, and a shared sense of responsibility. The OPCW stands ready to develop partnerships to this end. Our common goal is clear: to ensure that the practice of chemistry is always – and exclusively – committed to the pursuit of peace, security and prosperity for all.

With that, let me wish you all an enjoyable and productive workshop.

Shokran.