



ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

The Chemical Weapons Convention in 2017:

What Are the Boundaries to Its Future Evolution?

Introductory Remarks by Ambassador Ahmet Üzümcü

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OPCW Headquarters

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REMARKS AS DELIVERED

Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,

I welcome you all to this conference organised as part of the 20th anniversary of the entry into force of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). It has been a remarkable journey over the past two decades to which many professionals – including a great number of you here in this room today – have dedicated your time, energy, and effort.

This Conference provides us with an opportunity to reflect on our shared progress to eliminate chemical weapons to ensure the full implementation of the Convention and to address the new challenges.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The entry into force of the Chemical Weapons Convention in 1997 was a historic moment. It was the first multilateral treaty to ban an entire class of weapons of mass destruction in a non-discriminatory and verifiable manner under strict and effective international control. The Convention's verification regime remains the gold standard among multilateral disarmament agreements. This includes industry inspections to verify that the production and use of chemicals are intended solely for peaceful purposes.

The OPCW has made important contributions to global peace and security. Because of the commitment of 192 States Parties, 98 per cent of the world's population lives under the Convention's protection. 96 percent of chemical weapon stockpiles declared by States Parties have been destroyed under the verification of the OPCW, and the demilitarisation process will be completed by 2023.

The OPCW was highly successful in its endeavours to bring about a chemical weapons free world, and our accomplishments have been widely acknowledged. In 2013, the Norwegian Nobel Committee awarded the OPCW the Nobel Peace Prize for its extensive efforts to eliminate chemical weapons.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The road has not always been an easy one. Over the years, new challenges and legal questions have presented themselves which were not explicitly provided for in the treaty. But for a treaty to remain relevant, it must be able to grow as a living document and adapt through its interpretation to new circumstances. It would otherwise risk becoming obsolete.

Eliminating the Syrian chemical weapons programme has been a case in point. On the one hand, it has raised complex and unprecedented legal issues for the Organisation that are symptomatic of the emerging challenges we face. On the other, the OPCW's work in Syria aligns with our core mission of ensuring that all existing stockpiles are accounted for and destroyed.

In Syria, we had the unparalleled task of verifying a chemical disarmament process in the midst of an active conflict. The exceptional nature of this undertaking presented us with legal difficulties given the requirement that all possessor states destroy their weapons on their own territory and at their own cost.

The States Parties, however, agreed to the removal and destruction of Syria's chemical weapons outside the country, as well as generously provided the necessary in-kind and financial support. Together, we were able to achieve the destruction of the chemical weapons declared by Syria in a very short time despite the complexities.

Our work in Syria continues to this day. In response to persistent allegations of chemical attacks in Syria, in May 2014 the OPCW also set up a fact-finding mission to investigate allegations of use of chemical weapons in Syria. This mission, which has been endorsed by both the Executive Council and the Security Council has determined the use of chemical weapons in Syria. It has been instrumental in contributing to accountability.

In Libya, the OPCW has also had to adapt its modus operandi to extraordinary circumstances. After years of efforts by Libya, in conjunction with the international community and the OPCW, the remainder of Libya's chemical weapon stockpile was successfully removed from the country by a civil Danish merchant ship in July 2016.

While some of the mechanisms employed in Syria and Libya are not explicitly provided for in the text of the Convention, they are within its object and purpose – for the sake of mankind to exclude completely the possibility of the use of chemical weapons. In this way, the CWC regime has demonstrated that it is adaptable and flexible enough to develop new approaches to address unforeseen situations.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Despite considerable progress in the field of chemical disarmament, the OPCW's work is not done. It is simply changing.

As chemical weapon stocks dwindle to nil, safeguarding against their re-emergence and countering the mounting threat of chemical terrorism will require action on many fronts. The need for national implementation across the globe has paradoxically never been greater. The relative accessibility of materials and technologies required for making chemical weapons necessitates that the OPCW and States Parties adopt a more broad-ranging approach to chemical security.

This has been the focus of recent discussions in the OPCW's Open-Ended Working Group on Terrorism and its Sub-Working Group on Non-State Actors. In this context, both groups have provided a valuable platform for presentations by experts and fruitful deliberations among the States Parties. And in an encouraging sign of the States Parties' intention to prioritise this issue, the Executive Council recently adopted on 13 October 2017 an important decision addressing the threat posed by the use of chemical weapons by non-State actors.

To fulfil our own duty to help States Parties deal with chemical terrorism, in 2016 the Technical Secretariat established a Rapid Response and Assistance Mission, otherwise known as RRAM. The purpose of this initiative is to swiftly aid – upon request – States Parties affected by a chemical weapons attack carried out by a non-state actor, such as terrorist groups. The RRAM also enhances the Organisation's readiness to investigate and assess such attacks.

We must also keep up with the rapid advances in science and technology. New chemical substances and more efficient technologies are discovered every day. While they are expected to make immense contributions to public health, food safety, pest control, and numerous other sectors, they also present new dangers. With the increasing production of a wide range of new chemical compounds, chemistry has great potential but must be matched by strengthening practices. In the coming years, the OPCW will need to enhance its capability to assist States Parties in capacity-building. To that end, the OPCW has launched a project to transform the OPCW Laboratory into a Centre for Chemistry and Technology.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to take the opportunity to thank our distinguished moderators and panellists for joining us to address important questions of interpretation and implementation of the Convention.

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge that some of the issues to be discussed here today are politically charged. Nevertheless, I encourage panellists to speak openly, freely, and in their personal capacity so that we can benefit from their views and experience. I also encourage the audience to engage with panellists in a constructive and forward-leaning approach.

While we must acknowledge our past achievements which hold valuable lessons, we must reflect on the future. Preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons in this changing environment

will require collective efforts and action on many fronts. And in the spirit of cooperation that has always characterised the work of the Organisation, I look forward to productive discussions.

Thank you.
