

**Remarks by Director-General at  
University of Surrey**

**Honorary Conferment of Degree of Doctor**

**Guildford, Surrey, United Kingdom**

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Pro-Chancellor,  
Vice-Chancellor,  
Members of the Faculty,  
Graduants and families,

At the outset, I wish to congratulate the graduates and their families on this joyous occasion.

All those receiving degrees today have achieved something remarkable, for it is through the attainment of knowledge that the doors to one's progress and potential are unlocked.

It is a great honour to receive the Honorary Degree of Doctor from the University of Surrey.

I do so in my capacity as the Director-General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, or OPCW, which has longstanding cooperation with Surrey University.

In April this year we commemorated the centennial of the first large scale use of chemical weapons in Ypres, Belgium. During the First World War, nearly 100,000 people perished and 900,000 others were injured due to the use of chemical weapons.

For more than a century, chemical weapons have had a horrific impact on soldiers and civilians alike.

And we have recently seen how such weapons have been employed to incite fear and foment terror in Syria.

Building on earlier efforts to prohibit the development and use of these brutal weapons, and following protracted negotiations in Geneva, the Chemical Weapons Convention opened for signature in 1993.

Since its entry into force in 1997, this landmark agreement has attracted the membership of 191 countries, with only five countries yet to become party to the treaty.

Efforts to eradicate chemical weapons have brought about some of the most tangible and impressive results in disarmament ever seen.

Put simply, we have never been so close to eliminating an entire category of weapons of mass destruction.

For nearly two decades, from its headquarters in The Hague, the OPCW, as the implementing body for the Convention, has worked to bring about a world free of chemical weapons,

Much has been achieved in this short span of time.

With near universal membership, the OPCW has verified the destruction of ninety percent of declared chemical weapons, in eight States Parties.

To date, over 2,500 inspections of chemical industrial facilities have been carried out in more than eighty countries.

Our far-reaching efforts to eliminate chemical weapons in Syria – a country in the midst of a brutal civil war – have resulted in the destruction of 99% of Syria's declared chemical weapons stockpile.

We are on track to complete global chemical disarmament – or 100% of all declared chemical weapons – within eight years.

And although our organisation is not exactly a household name, our record of achievement recently drew the attention of the Nobel committee, when the OPCW was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2013.

One might say that chemical disarmament has been a bright spot for a planet riven by conflict and division.

And in a world where nuclear weapons still number in the thousands, reaching the goal of a world without chemical weapons should serve as a reminder that lofty

aspirations can become reality – if imagination, innovation and political will are applied in unison.

But we should be under no illusions: this is no easy task.

For achieving complete and comprehensive chemical disarmament is an enterprise that crosses borders and involves the efforts of thousands.

From scientists to politicians, educators to industry professionals – the task of eradicating these terrible weapons must be wide in ambition and multidisciplinary in approach.

Above all else, however, science and education play an increasingly vital role in this effort.

For we are not only engaged in the eradication of these weapons – our mission also demands that they never again re-emerge.

This second aspect of our work has particular resonance when we consider the ambitions of terrorists and other non-state actors to acquire – and use – chemical weapons.

For over fifteen years, the University of Surrey, with its excellent reputation and particular strengths in science and technology, has made substantial contributions to capacity building activities on the peaceful use of chemistry, particularly for developing countries.

Through a pioneering partnership between the OPCW, chemical industry, the University of Surrey and other institutions, more than 360 individuals from over 110 countries have received training through the Associates Programme, a flagship international cooperation initiative for the OPCW.

This unique programme provides participants with theoretical and practical technical skills in analytical chemistry and chemical engineering, and is a key input to strengthen national implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

By supporting trainees and building capacity among OPCW Member States for implementing the Convention, the University of Surrey is making a tangible contribution to international peace and security.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the University of Surrey, particularly the chemical engineering department, for playing an active role in the pursuit of peace through our partnership.

In the years to come, we hope to broaden the scope of our collaboration to realise our common vision of a world free of chemical weapons.

Nelson Mandela once remarked, “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

The University of Surrey’s collaboration with OPCW more than attests to this.

Through the weapon of education, we can move to eradicate a loathsome weapon of war.

I wish the students, who are graduating today from this institution, every success in building their careers – careers which I hope will make their own contribution to building peace and prosperity.

Thank you.