



ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

“Past Successes and Future Challenges for Global Chemical Disarmament”

Lecture by Director-General Ahmet Üzümcü at the University of Dhaka

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LECTURE AS DELIVERED

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Faculty Members Dear Students,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to be here with you today at the University of Dhaka.

The rich history of this institution is testament to the importance that Bangladesh places on education and learning, just as it values an active and positive role in international forums.

A fuller understanding of the world we live in is essential for a balanced outlook that comes from education.

Specialisation for professional success has become a modern day necessity. But we also know that for those aspiring for positions of responsibility and leadership, it is essential to possess and demonstrate broad based knowledge.

Despite its numerous contradictions, conflicts and failings, unprecedented human progress stands as a prominent feature of our world. Education today must include a good understanding of the international system; the opportunities it affords for advancement, and the rules that allow nations to co-exist in peace.

Just as individuals are expected to abide by the laws of their land, similarly nations must respect certain rules that are transnational. There is a rich, sometimes tragic history, of the evolution of norms that we now take for granted.

Many of these are codified in international agreements we call treaties and conventions. Rooted in an international consensus that supports the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction, some of these treaties cover the most dangerous weapons ever created.

Civil society organisations, scientists, students and people of goodwill everywhere devote their time and energies in campaigning for disarmament. They believe, and rightly so, that durable peace is unattainable in world where we can threaten our fellow human beings with mass annihilation. They often refer to the success of one international treaty that has shown the path to effective disarmament, namely, the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC).

Under this Convention, chemical weapons today stand totally banned. And, from its headquarters in the Netherlands, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) implements this international treaty.

The CWC is the first multilateral treaty to comprehensively prohibit an entire category of weapons of mass destruction on a non-discriminatory basis and under conditions of strict verification.

The CWC does not create any exceptions. All States Parties in possession of chemical weapons must destroy their stockpiles according to given deadlines.

As a multifaceted tool, the goals of the Convention also include non-proliferation, promotion of international cooperation for peaceful applications of chemistry and providing assistance and protection to States Parties against chemical weapons.

It is also the first disarmament treaty to establish an international organisation to implement a range of programmes that are based on these objectives. International verification in particular is a major task assigned to the OPCW.

The Organisation also provides to its States Parties a forum for consultation and cooperation and, when needed, facilitates clarification, co-operation and fact-finding that contribute to confidence-building amongst its Member States.

Destruction of chemical weapons being one of our core objectives, the Organisation has thus far verified the destruction of 94% of the 71,000 metric tonnes of chemical weapons stockpiles that were declared by States Parties.

With the potential of chemical warfare agents also being produced in commercial facilities, the Convention extends the reach of verification to the global chemical industry.

This is essentially a confidence building measure and not one driven by suspicion. As a matter of fact, without the willing cooperation of the global chemical industry, the CWC would not be the success story that it is today.

The total number of facilities around the world considered relevant for the purposes of the Convention is in the range of 5,000. These are liable to be declared and indeed those producing chemicals deemed to be of most relevance are regularly inspected. So far, over 3000 such inspections have been carried out in about 80 countries.

Another tool for ensuring that chemical weapons do not re-emerge is the regime monitoring

global exports and imports of chemicals covered by the Convention.

Member States are required to carefully monitor such transfers and to report relevant information to the OPCW. To streamline procedures and to make this monitoring tool more effective, the Organisation works closely with the World Customs Organisation (WCO).

The CWC aims to both eliminate chemical weapons and to prevent their re-emergence. It is not intended at all to hamper the scientific, economic or technological development of its Parties. On the contrary, under its Article XI, the Convention provides for the promotion of international cooperation in the field of chemical activities for peaceful purposes.

OPCW has for this purpose established a wide range of programmes. For instance, the OPCW trains chemists and engineers in industrial best practices to safely manage chemicals in a complex industrial environment.

There are additionally programmes designed to enhance analytical skills in chemistry, for funding research projects and sponsoring internships for qualified people at reputed research institutions. Yesterday I met 10 alumnis of the OPCW associate programme which last 9 weeks every year, with some practical training in chemical industrial plants. The alumni told me that they benefitted extensively from this experience in their future careers.

These programmes also serve to reinforce support for the Convention amongst our membership; a majority of which are developing countries or those whose economies are in transition.

This same group of countries is also interested in enhancing their national capacity for protection against chemical weapons. Article X of the Convention embodies the right of all States Parties to seek assistance and protection against the threat of chemical weapons or if it actually becomes a victim of a chemical attack. The provisions of this article envisage a coordination mechanism among Member States to mobilise the provision of emergency assistance to the country that might face an emergency situation and requires such international assistance.

The development of national preparedness and of mechanisms for emergency assistance in case of such an attack is an essential part of the security assurance that States receive by joining the Convention.

The Secretariat has been working extensively in collaboration with our States Parties with a view to ensuring effective emergency response capacity.

We have recently been engaged in the setting up of a Rapid Response and Assistance Mission (RRAM) to respond to possible requests from our members for emergency measures of assistance in the case of use of chemical weapons or toxic chemicals.

In April next year, the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) will complete two decades of its operation. A transition awaits the OPCW which has already fulfilled a major part of one of its core responsibilities. The verified destruction of chemical weapons declared by States Parties is expected to be completed by 2023.

The Convention has brought significant benefits and advanced the objectives of international security.

We are now required to adjust our priorities to better meet the challenges of the future. Progress made in the destruction of chemical weapons is an important but not the only factor that defines the transition for the Organisation.

Making the world free from chemical weapons and sustaining that status, will remain an enduring task and one requiring constant attention, support and resilience.

One of our most formidable challenges has been our work in Syria. The Organisation was called upon to assist in and oversee the elimination of the Syrian Arab Republic's chemical weapons programmes amidst a raging internal armed conflict.

Following a period of growing international tensions in the second half of 2013, Syria declared its intention to join the Chemical Weapons Convention in September that year.

On 27 September, the OPCW's Executive Council agreed on a programme for eliminating the country's chemical weapons programme. This was endorsed the same day by the United Nations Security Council.

Within days of these decisions, our inspectors were deployed and in a Joint Mission with the United Nations, began verifying the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons programme.

With the support of more than 30 of our Member States, the bulk of chemical weapons material was removed from Syria and destroyed outside its territory.

This included the destruction of the most dangerous chemicals on board an especially equipped naval vessel of the United States of America. The entire operation was carried out without any threat to the environment or jeopardising the safety of personnel on board.

The removal and destruction of Syria's chemical weapons did not conclude our work in that country.

In April 2014, I established a Fact-Finding Mission to look into several credible allegations of use of chlorine as a weapon.

Since then, this Mission has examined a significant number of incidents and substantiated the use of chlorine as a weapon. It has also confirmed an instance of the use of sulfur mustard.

In August last year, the Security Council adopted a resolution establishing the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism. (JIM)

This mechanism is mandated to identify the perpetrators of chemical weapon attacks in Syria, and it recently reported its findings to the UN Security Council re-confirming the use of chemical weapons in the conflict in Syria.

This is a deeply disturbing situation. It highlights that our world is not yet free from the threat of chemical weapons; that we need to remain vigilant and to work closely together to fully realise the aims and objectives of the CWC.

Recent developments make it clear that the OPCW faces new and emerging challenges in an increasingly complex security environment.

The threat from terrorists represents an ever present danger. Their resort to the use of chemical weapons has been confirmed in a number of instances in the Middle East.

The international legal framework offers several avenues for greater cooperation and coordination between international organisations in the context of counter-terrorism.

More importantly, our Member States can adopt measures within their domestic jurisdictions that will strengthen their own security as well as contribute to international security.

It is crucial for all States Parties to have in place the administrative structures and the domestic legislation necessary to give legal effect to their obligations under the CWC.

A legal framework through legislation and the means to enforce it create the domestic capacity to monitor, to report, and to guide activities involving chemicals along peaceful and productive lines. An effective domestic regime conveys a strong message to those who may harbour ill intent.

I am pleased to state here that Bangladesh is fulfilling its obligations deriving from the Convention, in an excellent manner. The NA in charge of coordination is very well organised. However, there are a significant number of our States Parties who have yet to adopt such measures.

The OPCW on its part remains committed to providing them all necessary assistance. A significant portion of our resources is in fact devoted to this objective. For example, the OPCW offers tools and workshops for helping legal drafters to prepare relevant legislation.

We have programmes to assist law enforcement and customs officials in identifying and monitoring the production and transfer of any chemicals that could be misused as weapons.

The rate of growth in our membership has been the fastest for any disarmament treaty. It is a symbol of the international community's firm support for the Convention.

Though the vast majority of States are now part of the Convention, a handful of States remain outside the Convention.

It is critical that these States join the Convention at the earliest possible.

We are optimistic that one of these States – namely, South Sudan – will become a member of the Convention in the near term.

The remaining three – Egypt, Israel and North Korea – represent more challenging prospects for joining the Convention.

We nonetheless take every opportunity to advocate and call upon all States to join without delay.

The norms of the Convention are now regarded as universal. What remain are just a few steps towards truly universal membership. This will inevitably help promote regional and global security.

The success of the CWC has been the result of multilateral negotiations that carefully considered the long term durability of the prohibitions that were established.

Science was an important factor in shaping the verification regime of the Convention. But it was negotiated nearly two decades ago. During this period, developments in science and technology have been nothing short of transformational.

An effective industry-verification regime, together with data monitoring, is the bedrock of the Convention's objective of preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons.

The verification regime must keep pace with the growing number of chemical facilities and capabilities that did not exist at the time the Convention was negotiated. Together with refining our industry verification regime, we also need to keep close watch on the impact of emerging technologies.

The OPCW Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) comprises 25 eminent experts and is tasked with the responsibility to keep developments in science and technology under review. Their work will continue to assume increasing importance.

The rules of the Convention that outlaw chemical weapons will endure long after the declared stockpiles have been eliminated. To promote greater awareness of these norms, we are engaged in broadening our outreach to the community of stakeholders that include scientists, the civil society, industry representatives and members of the public.

A recently established Advisory Board on Education and Outreach has been tasked with the responsibility of devising programmes and strategies in this regard. As part of our ongoing engagement with academia, we are also working towards the promotion of a culture of responsible science in universities and schools.

The objective is to raise awareness among researchers and students of the broader strategic context of their work, and of their responsibility to ensure that the knowledge and skills that science imparts are not misused.

Additionally, we have facilitated discussions by scientists and chemical industrialists from across the globe, who developed the Hague Guidelines – a code of ethics for chemistry professionals.

These guidelines are intended to serve as a practical baseline for adoption by scientific and industry associations, and have attracted a favourable response. The International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry (IUPAC) has endorsed it. You may have access to the guidelines on our website.

I have presented to you a broad overview of both the accomplishments of the CWC and the challenges that lie ahead of us.

In a world that sometimes finds it difficult to agree on issues of international importance, the CWC and the OPCW have stood out as an example of the success of multilateralism.

Fulfilling the mandate enshrined in the Convention was never going to be an easy task. Our Member States have shown remarkable goodwill and dedication in building a strong and vibrant multilateral Organisation. The work of the OPCW makes a major contribution to peace and security as envisaged in the Charter of the United Nations.

It offers an example of what can be accomplished when nation work together motivated by a

common goal.

The goal is equally a humanitarian one and is reflected in the preamble of the CWC: “Determined for the sake of all mankind to exclude completely the possibility of the use of chemical weapons...”

I feel hopeful that with the participation and support of people from across the globe and future leaders like you, we will continue to advance steadily towards the vision embodied in the Convention; the vision of a world that is forever free from the threat of chemical weapons.

Thank you.