



ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

The Chemical Weapons Convention: A Model of International Solidarity and the Power of a Universal Ideal

Remarks by Ambassador Ahmet Üzümcü, OPCW Director-General

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REMARKS AS DELIVERED

Ladies and gentleman,

Distinguished guests,

It is a great honour for me to speak at the Australian Institute for International Affairs, which has a well-earned reputation as a preeminent policy think tank. My visit is an opportunity to express appreciation on behalf of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) for Australia's strong commitment to the goals of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and its support for our work.

Australia has long played a crucial role on the international stage, as a formative contributor to both international institutions and ideals. Australia was a founding member of the UN and was a prominent voice in the negotiation of the United Nations Charter in 1945. Australia was also one of eight nations involved in drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which was adopted in the General Assembly of the United Nations in December 1948. The heart of the Declaration, proclaims a universal vision for a "world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief, and freedom from fear and want" as the highest aspiration of the common people; a peaceful and secure world to which the OPCW has been contributing for the past two decades.

This year, we mark indeed the 20th Anniversary of the entry into force of the Chemical Weapons Convention and the founding of the OPCW. Australia has been a key player throughout our history and can rightly share in our success. During the negotiations, your country's skilful diplomacy drafted and put forth a complete text of the Convention which reflected compromises on many outstanding and critical issues.

The distinguished Australian diplomat, the late Mr John Gee, made an invaluable contribution during the negotiations as well as in the initial phase of the OPCW; first as the Director of Verification in the Provisional Secretariat and later, as the Deputy Director-General of the OPCW.

The international community is united in our belief that chemical weapons have no place in a civilized world. As we work towards a future free from chemical weapons, we must remember that this aspiration is not merely borne out of a desire for disarmament, but of larger hopes. We seek it so that we may live in a safer world, in freedom from fear. This universal ideal rests at the core of all our efforts, and tirelessly drives us on to permanently eradicate chemical weapons.

To date, 192 countries, accounting for 98 percent of the world's population have answered the call to eliminate these weapons through the Chemical Weapons Convention. As we mark the Convention's twentieth anniversary, it is important to recall how and why this progress was achieved and what justifies its preservation through unremitting efforts. This reflection is important not only to lay the path for the future, but so that we do not forget the dark history that moved the world towards this global ban. It is important, because although norms are powerful, they can change. In the case of chemical weapons, we must never allow this to happen.

The use of chemical weapons has long been regarded as contrary to the norms of customary international law. Poison gas, as these weapons were once called, spreads insidiously laying waste to any life in its path be that men, women or children. Chemical weapons were used on a massive scale during the First World War. In all 1.3 million casualties resulted with nearly 100,000 dead. Never before had the world seen carnage of this nature and on this scale.

Following the Second World War, driven by the instinct for self-preservation, the international community established a new framework for the conduct of countries in the form of the United Nations. It was the very first resolution of the United Nations General Assembly in 1946 that called for 'the elimination from national armaments of atomic weapons and all other major weapons adaptable to mass destruction.' This resolution captured the mood of the time against further warfare and bloodshed. It expressed the common will to constrain humanity from a path that could lead to its own ruin.

However, for decades thereafter, the Cold War seriously hampered the realisation of this vision and kept the world on the brink. The fall of the Berlin Wall revived this promise, and ushered in a new spirit of cooperation between the United States and the Soviet Union, and later, the Russian Federation.

At the same time, persistent use of chemical weapons in the Iran-Iraq War and graphic images of some of the most terrible chemical attacks caused a public outcry. The massacre of civilian residents in Sardasht and Halabja by Saddam Hussein's forces in 1987 and 1988 became emblematic of the inhumane and indiscriminate nature of chemical weapons. The fact that several of the world's major chemical-producing countries had inadvertently supplied materials to weapon programmes in Iraq and Syria, and possibly elsewhere, was cause for great alarm. This showed that chemical weapons were a global problem that needed a global response.

All of these historical factors played a crucial role in facilitating a broad, all-encompassing approach to developing a permanent ban against chemical weapons – one that addressed the shortcomings of previous attempts. The 1925 Geneva Protocol and the 1899 Hague Convention banned only the use of chemical weapons, not the weapons themselves, a critical loophole. Just as importantly, they lacked any enforcement mechanism holding States Parties to their commitment

The Convention fills both of these gaps. It prohibits not only the use of chemical weapons, but also their development, production, acquisition, stockpiling, retention and transfer. And the Convention has specific provisions for addressing noncompliance, ranging from suspension of rights and privileges under the Convention, to imposition of sanctions under international law. As importantly, the Convention enjoys a unique combination of provisions that make it stand apart from other disarmament treaties. Not only do all of its rights and obligations apply to all States Parties equally, the Convention's verification regime holds States Parties to their obligations.

Ladies and gentleman,

Impressive progress has been made under the convention in twenty short years. Over 95% of 72 000 tons of declared chemical warfare agents have been destroyed under the OPCW's verification. This marks the first time in history that weapons of mass destruction have been systematically destroyed under an international

treaty and under multilateral supervision.

The Convention's international verification regime remains the gold standard among multilateral disarmament agreements. With nearly 3500 industry inspections, the regime is a well tried and tested tool for promoting confidence in compliance with the Convention.

Our international cooperation programmes continue to assist States Parties in developing their capacities in the use of chemistry. Assistance and protection against chemical weapons is an important right enjoyed by States Parties and our programmes in this area continue to strengthen. National implementation of the Convention is showing encouraging progress. Only four countries in the world are not yet party to the Convention.

In our short history, we have also carried out unprecedented missions such as our work in Syria. In August of 2013, the world witnessed the killing of 1400 innocent civilians in Ghouta. Unarmed and innocent civilians that included scores of children living in a densely populated neighbourhood were brutally murdered with the nerve agent sarin. A crisis threatening an international armed conflict seemed imminent. This was averted when Syria joined the CWC following an agreement signed in Geneva between the Russian Federation and the United States of America. Far reaching decisions were adopted by the Executive Council of the OPCW and the UN Security Council.

The mission that followed to remove Syria's chemical weapons was unprecedented. It required us to operate in uncertain and risky conditions in an active war zone within a very ambitious time frame. Although clearly challenging, the mission underscores that with political will and cooperation, the Organisation and the international community are capable of dealing with extraordinary situations. With the support of more than 30 States Parties, including Australia, 1300 metric tonnes of chemical weapons material was removed from Syria and destroyed outside its territory. This was an impressive achievement.

Unfortunately it did not mark the end of our work in Syria. In the face of persistent and credible allegations that chlorine was being used in Syria as a chemical weapon, I established a Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) in April 2014. Since that time, the Fact-Finding Mission has examined a significant number of incidents and substantiated several cases of the use of toxic chemicals as weapons and an incident involving sulfur mustard.

In early April, credible reports emerged of another brutal attack in Khan Shaykhun area of Idlib province. The FFM has confirmed this as an attack with Sarin, a nerve agent and Category I chemical weapon. This is behaviour that flies in the face of every civilized norm and cannot be tolerated. No religion or culture rationalises such brutality. The Organisation not only has the mandate but an absolute responsibility to do everything within its capacity to confront such a situation. In this context, the work of the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism which has the mandate to identify the perpetrators assumes high importance. With the norms of the Convention accepted globally, we would all have hoped and wished that the ugly legacy of use of chemical weapons had been finally buried; that a dark chapter of history had been forever closed. We were and remain committed as stated in the preamble of the Convention 'to exclude completely the possibility of the use of chemical weapons.'

As we near the complete destruction of declared stockpiles of chemical weapons, it is clear that much remains to be done. As the CWC constitutes a permanent prohibition against chemical weapons, the work is far from complete to prevent their re-emergence. This complex task will not be a single track undertaking, but rather will require action on many fronts, continued support of States Parties, and engaging further many partners.

We must work with our critical partners in industry. The chemical industry is growing and evolving. Although the OPCW verification regime is demonstrably robust, the more than 5,300 chemical production

facilities declared by States Parties are producing an ever wider range of new compounds. The shape and reach of the industry is changing as well. Rapid growth is occurring in Asia since the Convention came into force, which means that over 50% of the global chemical industry has become concentrated in this region. In addition to growth in the industry, advances in chemistry, chemical technology and engineering are rapidly transforming the industry which will impact the Convention's verification regime. This makes it necessary for us to have the ability to detect new chemicals and establish if they are relevant to the Convention. Similarly, we need to acquire a deeper understanding of the growing interaction between chemistry and biology which also gives rise to the ability to produce potentially dangerous chemicals through new techniques and methods.

In this regard, we must work with our partners in the scientific community. The OPCW Scientific Advisory Board plays an important role as the organisation's scientific counsel, as well as a bridge to this invaluable stakeholder group. Dr Veronika Borret, a leading expert in chemical warfare agents, ably represents Australia on the SAB. Previously Bob Mathews has played an important role as a member of SAB. His outstanding contributions to the achievements of the goals of the CWC have been recognised in 2014 by awarding the OPCW-The Hague Award.

Progress in science also offers opportunities for improving verification and protection measures with the attendant imperative of promoting ethical practices through awareness raising and education. On the side of ethics and education the OPCW has established an Advisory Board on Education and Outreach. The Board seeks to guide the development of new activities, and teaching tools to increase awareness of the dangers posed by the possible misuse of dual-use technology. They also help us to disseminate our message to universities and schools in order to nurture a culture of responsible science. The goal is to develop and promote professional ethics that support the aims of the CWC.

Maintaining a close relationship with National Authorities, scientists and experts, industry, international partners and nongovernment organisations is important for global chemical security and the effectiveness of the Convention.

While stockpiles of weapons are diminishing, the threat of chemical terrorism is rising. The spectre of non-state-actors is now a very real concern. We have already seen the willingness and ability of some groups of obtaining and using chemical weapons. To counter such threats, the OPCW is working with its Member States in two ways.

On the legal front, we are working with States Parties to establish effective legal and regulatory structures and the necessary domestic means to administer them. The existence of laws and the ability to enforce them is essential in preventing non-state actors from gaining access to materials and equipment that could be used for the production of chemical weapons. Although more needs to be done, the domestic implementation of the CWC has continually improved. Over the years we have carried out programmes that assist our States Parties in this regard. I believe another step that can be of substantial benefit is for States Parties to not confine themselves to the familiar template of national implementation but to continue to review the new threats and possible additional legislative and administrative measures for prevention. This of course will vary for each country and those desirous of seeking the assistance of the OPCW should feel assured of our full cooperation. In this context, the OPCW's Open-ended Working Group on Terrorism offers an important forum for a more in-depth exploration of the ways and means for a strengthened OPCW role in counter-terrorism and for sharing best practices.

Secondly, in the case that the worst should happen, we are helping States Parties to build capabilities for effective emergency response. As part of this capability we have established a Rapid Response Assistance Mission (RRAM). The RRAM can be deployed upon request from our member states to provide emergency assistance in the case of a chemical weapons attack. The spectre of chemical terrorism demands more effective multilateral coordination.

Moreover, I am also of the view that there is untapped scope for greater collaboration between international organisations on a broader platform including in the field of counter-terrorism. Collaboration often occurs on an Ad Hoc basis, as happened in the case of the Joint Mission in Syria. We need to find avenues for making such partnerships more institutionalised and therefore more reliable. I believe that the policy making organs of various international organisations should devote attention to identifying the several areas of mutually beneficial cooperation. A pooling of expertise and resources and the utilisation of synergies can greatly benefit us all given the ultimate unity of our goals and objectives that outweighs any political sensitivities or differences of membership. For example, UN Security Council resolution 1540 (2004) represents an important instrument for denying weapons of mass destruction capabilities to non-state actors. At its heart lies the same notion of effective national legal frameworks and enforcement ability. The OPCW, with its institutional capacity, experience and implementation support record, is uniquely placed to advance the objectives of that resolution.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Over the last twenty-years, the CWC and the OPCW have made a major contribution to the international goals of peace and security. Regimes such as the CWC are not built overnight. Time, resources and an extraordinary cooperative spirit have built up an institution that serves a vital purpose and offers a wealth of accumulated knowledge and experience. We must work together to not only preserve this enterprise but to strengthen it further to meet the challenges of an uncertain future.

I thank you for your attention.
