



ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

Closing Remarks by the Director-General

Sixth Regional Basic Training Course on Assistance and Protection

Against Chemical Weapons

Tehran, Iran

2 July 2017

REMARKS AS DELIVERED

H.E. Hossein Dehghani Poudeh, Minister of Defence of Iran
Dr Abbas Araghchi, Deputy Minister for Legal and International Affairs
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to be with you today at the sixth edition of this regional training course on Assistance and Protection Against Chemical Weapons. I take this opportunity to recognize the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran for hosting this event. For many years, Iran and the OPCW have collaborated to offer assistance and protection training here in Tehran. This year, the course has been organised for first responders, for the first time, to provide critical training to those on the front lines of emergency response.

I would also like to congratulate the participants for completing this important course. The training provided here is the foundation for developing measures to protect against and respond to chemical weapons incidents. The citizens of Iran know too well the ravages caused by chemical weapons. June 28 marked the 30th anniversary of the horrific chemical weapons attack in Sardasht. On that terrible day, the innocent citizens of Sardasht, men women and children, were engulfed in toxic chemicals.

The attack killed over 100 citizens, and the vast majority of those that survived suffered serious long-term impacts. On behalf of the OPCW, I convey our deepest condolences to the people of Sardasht and our continued assurance of support. Unfortunately, this tragedy did not end the use of chemical weapons in the region. However, these terrible events did give impetus to an international dialogue about the need to rid the world of chemical weapons.

The horror of such attacks awakened the international community to the inhumanity of chemical weapons as agents of warfare. This universal intolerance marked a rare instance where the

international community was able to agree on a principle, and take collective action. Ten years after the tragedy in Sardasht, the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) entered into force, and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) was founded. This year, we also mark this important milestone. In doing so, we take comfort that in the ashes of this terrible tragedy, the seeds were planted to prevent such an atrocity from ever happening again. As we commemorate 20 years of our collective endeavour for the permanent abolition of chemical weapons, we pay homage to the memory of the victims, in Sardasht, and across the world.

They remind us of the human toll when morality is recklessly abandoned and universal norms breached. The Convention and the work of the OPCW represent the most effective response to such cruelty; a ray of hope illuminating a dark shadow on our history. Much has been accomplished in the 20 years since the world's intolerance for chemical weapons was put into action through the Convention.

Today, 192 countries representing 98% of the world's population are States Parties to the Convention. Significantly, over 95 percent of the large and dangerous stockpiles of declared chemical weapons have been verifiably eliminated. Thousands of verification-related inspections have been conducted. It is a daily occurrence for chemical industry somewhere in the world to be inspected as part of a regime that builds mutual confidence and trust. The Organisation enjoys the support of the global chemical industry; our cooperation with that industry is unique in the history of disarmament and a symbol of the industry's sense of responsibility. Our network of cooperation continues to grow to engage an ever-wider audience that includes international organisations, academia, the scientific and technological communities and civil society. This is important in view of the wide range of stakeholders that must be engaged in order for the Organisation to focus on preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons; this will remain our enduring mission.

For all the OPCW has accomplished over the last twenty years, it is clear that the threat posed by chemical weapons remains very real. The OPCW's assistance and protection initiatives, such as the training provided here, are crucial to assisting States Parties in preventing and responding to chemical attacks. These initiatives build national capacities and have a multiplier effect in broadening the pool of experts that participate in national protective programmes.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Your work makes an invaluable contribution to the implementation of the Convention, in serving to protect people from the threat of chemical weapons attacks and incidents involving chemical weapons. Under Article X of the Convention, State Parties can request the OPCW or other States to provide assistance and protection against the use, or threat of use, of chemical weapons.

Such assistance may include the provision of defensive equipment, such as chemical agent detectors, protective clothing, or decontamination equipment. It may also take the form of medical assistance and equipment, including antidotes, or offering of advice on defensive measures. Also important is the cooperative regional approach that underpins our assistance and protection efforts.

Events like this one serve to extend the reach of our assistance and protection regime, thereby enhancing both national and regional capacities to manage the threat of chemical weapons use.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Improving our ability to prepare for and respond to chemical weapons attacks must be matched with greater collaboration and a recommitment to the international norm against chemical weapons.

It was ideal that led to the crafting of the CWC. Now, in the face of re-emergence, it is more important than ever to reaffirm this commitment, and put it into action. In closing, I hope your participation in this course was fruitful and productive. I trust it will increase capacity in the region to prepare for and respond to the threat of chemical weapons.

Thank you.
