

-Check Against Delivery-



ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION  
OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

ADDRESS BY

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AT

ROYAL SOCIETY OF CHEMISTRY,  
BELGIUM SECTION

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Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

At about the same time last year, I visited the Royal Society of Chemistry in London and had the opportunity to speak to a learned audience. I was deeply impressed by both the calibre of the people I met and the work of the Society. So it was without hesitation that I accepted the invitation to visit the Society again, this time at its Brussels chapter. And it gives me equal pleasure to speak again today on a subject that is not known to make headline news but continues to quietly and meaningfully serve the cause of international peace and security.

I am indeed grateful to the Royal Society, in particular Tim Reynolds and Robert Crichton for giving me this opportunity not just to inform you about our work but to ask for your support, the support of the scientific community for this cause.

The value and contribution of Organisations such as yours to the betterment of global society cannot be over emphasized. Chemistry's contribution to society and the global economy are incalculable. Yet chemistry and its advancements must at all times be informed by ethical considerations. The RSC renders an invaluable service by upholding and propagating sound professional ethics.

Every science bears within itself the potential for both benefit as well as harm. Chemistry has been no different. The terrible suffering unleashed by chemical weapons during World War I remains a powerful memory even under the fading influence of time. Only those who suffer know truly the pain that such an atrocity inflicts. And unfortunately, there have

been repeats of such tragedies on far too many occasions since. In three years from now, the world will mark the first centennial of the large scale use of chemical weapons at Ieper – which is not far from where we meet.

As we approach that sober landmark, we are reminded of the grief that science can so easily inflict. And it is our collective responsibility to guard against all such tendencies that can turn an instrument of human progress into a vehicle for mass destruction.

The aspiration to promote peace and security requires for its fulfilment unremitting efforts. In my view these endeavours are not the responsibility of governments alone. Civil society and professional associations have a crucial role to play. They must work together; hand and hand.

Our technological civilization is advancing at a pace unprecedented in human history. The phrase ‘cutting-edge’ changes meaning rapidly. Competition, innovation and efficiency offer a staggering range of goods and services. Voracious consumer habits drive demand in an ever expanding global marketplace.

In this environment of intense activity; time seems scarce for reflection on normative issues. But historical lessons and moral imperatives must not be forgotten. They constitute the foundations for an equitable and humane global order. They are also ingredients in the advancement of humanitarian law. And, respect for law cannot be confined to the domestic sphere if we are to remain on a path of progress for humanity as a whole.

Promoting awareness of international legal norms is a necessity of our times. The Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) is part of a body of international rules meant to save humanity from the most dangerous and inhumane weapons created by man.

It is a complex treaty. But at its heart lies a simple and compelling objective; to ensure that no human being will ever be subjected to the cruelty of chemical weapons. Similarly, our Organisation; the OPCW, which is responsible for implementing this treaty, has a mission that is adequately captured in its organisational motto: ‘Working together for a world free of chemical weapons’.

The founders of the Chemical Weapons Convention provided States Parties with a four-pillared foundation: First of all, is the goal of destruction of all declared chemical weapons stockpiles, under international verification, and their associated production facilities. Second, to ensure the prevention of the re-emergence of chemical weapons as well as preventing the spread of such weapons – to this end, the OPCW operates a comprehensive global industry inspection regime. Third, States Parties, joining the Convention agree to provide each other assistance and protection against chemical weapons; and the fourth pillar refers to the promotion of the peaceful uses of chemistry under the umbrella of international cooperation activities.

During the past 15 years of this Convention’s operation, we have come a long way in making progress across the board. There are 188 States that have accepted the total ban on chemical weapons codified in the Convention.

As regards the destruction of chemical weapons, three quarters of all declared stockpiles worldwide will have been verifiably destroyed by next month.

The Russian Federation and the United States of America as the two largest possessor States are making steady progress towards the complete destruction of their respective stockpiles. While they will miss the final deadline of April 2012, the 16th Session of the OPCW Conference of States Parties held late last year has taken a decision that will enable both countries to fulfil their obligations while providing more transparency and increased reporting requirements.

The Conference did not adopt a punitive approach. It recognised that there were circumstances well beyond the control of the two countries who were otherwise engaged in a sincere effort to get rid of their chemical weapons at great expense. There are no shortcuts to destroying the most toxic substances ever created. The facilities have to be purpose built assuring safety for the personnel and the environment. The decision of the Conference is reflective of the positive spirit of multilateral cooperation that characterises our work.

Together with eliminating existing chemical weapons, the Convention also puts in place measures to prevent their re-emergence. For this, it has a unique feature whereby it extends verification to the global chemical industry. Commonly referred to as a non-proliferation tool, the OPCW conducts round-the-year inspections of industrial facilities which produce chemicals that are of relevance to the Convention.

The total number of such facilities globally is in the range of 5,000. These are liable to be inspected and indeed those producing chemicals deemed to be of most relevance are regularly inspected by the Secretariat. So far, more than 2000 such inspections have been carried out around the world in 80 countries. The aim is to ensure that those facilities only operate for the peaceful purposes they were intended for.

On the promotional side, assurances of assistance and protection against chemical weapons; their use or threat of use, constitute an important right that all States Parties gain as a result of their membership of the Convention. States Parties are also assured of benefits through international cooperation programmes of the Organisation. For understandable reasons these are areas of special importance to many of our Member States whose economies are developing or in transition.

It is Article X of the CWC that entitles States Parties to receive assistance and protection against the use or threat of use of chemical weapons. Delivery of a quick response necessitates adequate preparations by the OPCW to coordinate actions with those States Parties that have pledged assistance as well as the relevant international organisations. Compiling a database containing offers of assistance as well as holding field exercises are some of the measures that allow an adequate level of preparedness for possible contingencies.

Assistance and protection is an area of growing interest, especially, as perceptions shift from the receding threat of use of chemical weapons in an intra-state conflict to the possibility of terrorism involving classical or improvised chemical weapons. The OPCW offers, in this area, capacity

building and training opportunities to States Parties for their relevant authorities such as civil defence organisations and first responders.

Similarly Article XI of the Convention is designed to promote international cooperation in peaceful uses of chemistry. In this context, a major focus of our programmes relates to building capacities in our Member States. These include courses to develop analytical skills, support for research projects and placement of interns at various institutions around the world.

One most well known training programme, namely, the Associate Programme attracts talented chemists and chemical engineers and is designed to enhance their skills through both academic exposure as well as placements with chemical industry.

Ladies and gentleman,

I have briefly outlined the core programmes that enable us to implement the Convention in a manner that promotes both the security aspects of this important international treaty as well as its cooperative spirit.

Few international legal instruments have performed as well as the CWC. The Convention has demonstrated how a complete ban on an entire category of weapons of mass destruction can be made to work.

While these are achievements our States Parties can rightly take credit for, we must also remain cognisant of the challenges that lie ahead.

These challenges are both organisational as well as strategic.

Thus far a major part of our resources have been dedicated to verifying the destruction of chemical weapons. The significant progress already registered in destruction of chemical weapons means a progressive phasing out of this activity. This will impact our human resource requirements and require internal changes in the Secretariat. The task ahead of us is to ensure operational effectiveness and an unaffected ability to respond to contingencies. These include the responsibility to conduct short notice inspections as well as investigations of alleged use of chemical weapons when asked to do so.

On the strategic side, the Convention was negotiated nearly two decades ago. During this period, science and technology have seen major advances. It is therefore crucial to take stock of the current state of the science and the production technologies that the Convention covers and adapt our industry verification regime accordingly.

We are fortunate in that the Convention has established a Scientific Advisory Board (SAB). It is composed of independent experts who are mandated to assess relevant scientific and technological developments and advise the Director-General on these subjects.

SAB's terms of reference also include: assessing the scientific and technological merit of a present or proposed methodology for use in verification; and, assessing and reporting on emerging technologies and new equipment which could be used in verification activities.

The 25 members of SAB – from 25 different countries – are eminent scientists from research institutions, universities, chemical industry companies, defence and military organisations with expertise in a

discipline relevant to the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention. They are appointed for a term of 3 years and may serve for a consecutive second term.

The SAB has recently established two temporary working groups: one on the convergence of chemistry and biology and the other on education and outreach.

The working group on convergence will consider a subject that could have an impact on the Convention from a technical standpoint. Although opinion seems to differ regarding how much of a risk recent developments in biology and biochemistry might pose to the object and purpose of the Convention, we need to understand the issue better to reach informed opinion.

The temporary working group on education and outreach, on the other hand, will deal with the objective of strengthening the normative aspects of the Convention.

In this time of rapid change, it is essential that we draw upon the full breadth of the intellectual resources that are available to us. And I am confident that the SAB will play its part in creating the necessary bridge between science and policy.

Our industry verification regime together with data monitoring of trade in relevant chemicals is the backbone of the Convention's non-proliferation objectives. Reinforcing the industry verification regime is necessary for maintaining the confidence in the Convention's effectiveness against the re-emergence of chemical weapons. Continued refinement and higher

intensity of our industry verification efforts with a focus on facilities most relevant to the object and purpose of the Convention remains for us an important undertaking.

Another dynamic that requires us to remain focussed on industry verification is the rapid evolution in the global chemical industry. While new products and processes and greater efficiencies promise more prosperity, these also give rise to the potential for great harm if not properly supervised. Developments that need to be carefully followed are increasing overlaps between chemical and biological sciences, the integration of chemical engineering into the life sciences, and the fusion between these and information technology.

New technologies, such as nanotechnology or the creation of new chemical manufacturing methodologies will need to be kept under study and review for therein also lies the potential of abuse.

Together with industry verification, monitoring of imports and exports of relevant chemicals forms an essential plank of the Convention's non-proliferation regime. The CWC divides such chemicals into what are called Schedules. The chemicals listed in the Annex on Chemicals in the Convention are considered to pose a risk to the object and purpose of the Convention.

The CWC requires its States Parties to control and report annually to the OPCW all exports and imports of scheduled chemicals above certain thresholds. In certain cases, trade is restricted to States that are not parties to the Convention. With the information received the OPCW implements

a monitoring regime over the global exports and imports of scheduled chemicals.

This monitoring is an important aspect of the implementation of the Convention. For example, by monitoring the trade and other data provided by States Parties, the Secretariat has been able to assist them in the identification of previously unrecognised and undeclared activities involving scheduled chemicals.

Although simple in its requirements, identifying such chemicals during international trade is a challenge. Most of those involved in the control of international trade are not chemists and the OPCW has been working closely with the WCO to help States Parties to overcome this problem.

To date, the World Customs Organisation has issued two Recommendations to members to insert specific Harmonized System codes to uniquely identify scheduled chemicals during international trade. So far we are aware of 71 States Parties adopting these recommendations.

The OPCW is now working with the WCO to include the 33 most traded scheduled chemicals in the next amendment to the Harmonized System in 2017. If adopted, this will mean that more than 99% of the worldwide trade in scheduled chemicals will have specific, mandatory codes in the Harmonised System.

Implementing such recommendations will help States Parties to control and to compile the necessary import and export information to submit to the OPCW.

To help Member States to implement more effective border controls as part of their obligations under the Convention, we regularly organise training programmes specifically for customs authorities.

Industry verification and trade controls are, however, not the only means of promoting non-proliferation. Deterrence against the possible acquisition, development and misuse of toxic chemicals and their precursors needs to be firmly and effectively established within the domestic jurisdiction of our Member States. They have to ensure that the prohibitions under the Convention are translated into domestic rules applicable to any individual or other entities operating within their jurisdiction or control.

We still have to cover considerable ground before reaching a stage where all our States Parties will have in place the necessary tools for the effective domestic implementation of the Convention's prohibitions and provisions. What is noteworthy, however, is the fact that the institutional support provided by the OPCW to its States Parties through a variety of support programmes is having a positive impact. The role of the European Union in supporting various programmes designed to improve the implementation of the Convention worldwide, has been crucial in this endeavour.

Another issue that is vital for the ultimate success of the CWC is universality. With 188 members, the Convention has come close to but not yet attained full universality.

The shared goal of a world free from the scourge of chemical weapons has motivated almost every nation to accept the obligations enshrined in

the CWC. Whether it is states possessing chemical weapons or those with nothing to declare, all have had to expend their energies and precious resources to demonstrate their commitment to this vision.

It is naturally disconcerting for them to know that there remain those few who chose not to participate in this project of great significance both from the point of view of security as well as the noble humanitarian impulse that it is designed to serve.

It therefore seems natural for concerns to be raised regarding the possible continued existence of chemical weapons in certain parts of the world once the declared possessors have completely destroyed the known stockpiles.

In the region of the Middle East, three countries are non-members. As per an important decision adopted by the 2010 Review Conference of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, a Conference is expected to be convened this year in Finland regarding the establishment of a zone free from all weapons of mass destruction. The OPCW has been asked to contribute to this effort and we remain prepared to do so whenever required. It is my hope that this endeavour will serve to focus the issue of universality of the Convention in this delicate region.

We will also continue our efforts with other remaining non-members and our efforts can be considerably helped by those States Parties that enjoy friendly and cooperative relations in the regions to which the remaining countries belong.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In order to stay relevant and effective organizations need to respond to change. With the steady progress that has been made towards consolidating the legal ban on chemical weapons, we are now required to look at the long term future and ensure that this prohibition will endure permanently. For this, we must remain prepared to respond to the demands of a dynamic future. I have consistently believed in the value of interacting with and soliciting support not just of governments but also the civil society and academic and professional bodies. Our goal is to ensure that the Convention remains a living document in the service of international peace and security.

In this context our relationship with the International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry is noteworthy. IUPAC's core objectives revolve around strengthening international chemistry. It seeks high standards of excellence and relevance in academic and industrial research. It also aims to promote the service of chemistry to society and to global issues and it is this vision that lays the basis for our partnership with IUPAC. As we explore and monitor the developing trends in science and technology that are relevant to the CWC, we seek to strengthen our relationship with IUPAC which recently held a successful meeting jointly sponsored by the OPCW.

Apart from exchanges on technical and scientific matters relevant to the Convention, IUPAC also has a crucial role to play in the area of education and awareness-raising about the norms and principles enshrined in the CWC.

Since becoming the Director-General, I have placed particular emphasis on our public diplomacy efforts to ensure that our work becomes better known and more widely supported.

A total ban on chemical weapons is no small achievement for the international community. We will continue to endeavour to strengthen this norm in order to keep our future generations safe from this scourge which has in the past brought death and untold suffering to those that became victims.

My message to you is to join this endeavour; to spread the word. To use your considerable expertise, influence and good will to ensure that the norms and values that we share are more widely known and supported. To guarantee through your work with students and apprentices that the chemist will always work for the betterment of the community and never use his knowledge and skills to bring harm to fellow human beings.

I thank you for your attention.