Modelling Multilateral Disarmament:
The Chemical Weapons Experience

Ahmet Üzümcü, Director-General OPCW

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Thank you, Dr Williams, for your generous introduction.

Professor Aydin,
Dr Edgar,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is indeed an honour to address you here at Kadir Has University.

It seems the University and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons share something in common – both institutions were founded in 1997. Clearly, this was a most auspicious year for new beginnings!

Let me take this opportunity to thank Dr Williams, as the Chair of the Board of Directors of the Academic Council on the United Nations System, the Rector of Kadir Has University, Professor Mustafa Aydin, the Executive Director of the Academic Council, Dr Alistair Edgar, and all their staff for organising this much anticipated annual event.

The Academic Council on the United Nations System – ACUNS – has played a vital role in promoting teaching about international organizations.

But it does much more than this. ACUNS also sources and disseminates ideas that enhance the effectiveness of the multilateral system.

This annual meeting is only one forum among many hosted by ACUNS that incubates thinking in this way.

None of us working in multilateral organizations or settings can afford not to consider fresh perspectives at a time of immense change and new challenges. This is especially the case, given that it has become fashionable, in some quarters, to speak of a crisis in multilateralism.

Some have argued, for instance, that multilateralism is failing as a result of weakened global leadership and the emergence of intractable non-traditional problems, from poverty alleviation to climate change, from internal conflicts to terrorism.

I do not share this view.

We are indeed facing a more complex set of challenges in a rapidly changing strategic environment. But my sense is that we are also still far from properly harnessing new opportunities.

These include more informed debate in our information-rich digital age, increasing interdependence through globalization, and more scope for innovation as a result of new technologies and a broadening community of stakeholders.

These opportunities can help bridge short-term political agendas and long-term vision by rendering new problem-solving tools – tools that help us devise solutions that are at once realistic as well as ambitious and, as such, have a good chance of success.

This, certainly, has been the experience of the OPCW in our work to implement the Chemical Weapons Convention.

It is this experience which I wish to share with you today.

In doing so, I also wish to explore with you what might be learned from the OPCW experience as a way of underwriting more effective approaches to existing disarmament challenges, as well as emerging ones.

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Since the OPCW was thrown into the international limelight with the Syria mission and award of the Nobel Peace Prize, I have been fond of pointing out the unique nature of the Chemical Weapons Convention, and of what we are doing to implement it.

And for good reason.

More than twenty years since it was concluded, the Convention remains the only multilateral disarmament treaty that bans an entire class of weapons of mass destruction, and polices this ban through international verification.

Two provisions particularly stand out in this regard.

First of all, unlike the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Chemical Weapons Convention – or CWC – does not discriminate between haves and have-nots. No member state is entitled to possess or develop chemical weapons, much less to use them.

And those few countries that do have chemical weapons are obliged to get rid of them.

Secondly, while the Biological Weapons Convention, like the CWC, outlaws an entire class of WMD, it has no means of verifying compliance.

Only the CWC has a verification regime that holds its members to account through one-of-a-kind provisions. These include on-site industry inspections and challenge inspections.

In this way, compliance with the CWC is underwritten by all 190 of its member states submitting to a transparent and thoroughgoing system of monitoring and verification administered by the OPCW.

The other unique feature of the Convention is the way in which it was negotiated.

Making sure that the treaty's comprehensive provisions could be implemented required inputs not only from diplomats and government officials, but also industry representatives and scientists.

Scientists had to draw up definitions, as well as provide advice on analytical and verification activities. And industry had to be satisfied that its commercially sensitive information could be safeguarded in the course of facility inspections.

Without their involvement, it is fair to say that there would be no Chemical Weapons Convention – or at least not in the comprehensive and accountable form we were able to obtain.

This was no easy task – notwithstanding the favourable post-Cold War climate in the endgame of negotiations, and the fact that the attention of negotiators was focused by use of chemical weapons in the Iran-Iraq War raging at that time.

Negotiations spanned two decades before achieving an outcome that could finally draw a line under the century-old effort to ban these heinous weapons, dating back to the Hague Convention of 1899.

In a valuable lesson for multilateral diplomacy, these negotiations rendered a stronger, more durable result because of the active engagement of all relevant stakeholders.

But no less important than the diplomacy that created the treaty is the diplomacy that has sustained it.

In implementing the CWC since its entry into force in 1997, we have converted dialogue between policy-makers, scientists, industry and civil society into true partnerships for compliance.

For the Convention is not just a string of fine words on paper. It stands for a practical norm of cooperation born of transparency and confidence.

We can see this in the work of the OPCW Scientific Advisory Board, which keeps us up to date on how advances in science and technology can impact on implementation of the CWC.

We can see this in our close consultations with industry – to streamline compliance obligations, including preparation of activity and materials declarations and reporting on transfers of chemicals.

We can see this in our engagement of non-government groups and academia – to source new ideas and to help them expand our constituency through education and outreach activities.

And, above all, we can see this in the interaction between member states.

The practice of consensus is firmly ingrained at the OPCW, not because of any formal requirement, but because of the force of habit – a habit that reflects a universal commitment to chemical disarmament.

This does not always make for tidy discussion. But it always delivers durable outcomes.

The proof is in the very tangible results we have been able to record over the seventeen years since the CWC entered into force in 1997.

So far, the OPCW has verified the destruction of more than 80% of declared chemical weapons. And we have inspected more than 2,500 industrial facilities in over 80 countries.

It is my firm view that there are valuable lessons to be learned for multilateral disarmament in the combining of all these features – namely, comprehensive verification mechanisms, active engagement of a broad community of stakeholders, and consensus-based decision-making.

Lessons which are not theoretical but very real and results-based.

Lessons which the mission to eliminate Syria's chemical weapons has served to reinforce.

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International reaction to the confirmed use of chemical weapons in Syria last August reminded us all of the strength and extent of feeling against these barbarous weapons.

So much so that Syria's subsequent decision to join the CWC saw the international community agree, for the first time, on one aspect related to the Syrian conflict. That was on the need to eliminate that country's chemical weapons programme and stockpile without delay.

Many factors have helped us deliver a destruction programme, proceeding from this important point of consensus on the indivisibility of chemical security.

The ready-made, tried-and-tested provisions of the CWC were a crucial baseline – along with member states' readiness to take swift, concrete action. This has meant not only providing generous financial and in-kind assistance, but also agreeing to bend the rules to achieve practical outcomes.

The decision to remove chemical weapons from Syria for destruction outside the country was pivotal in this regard.

The CWC's 190 member states understood not only the momentousness of this opportunity to rid the world of a major chemical arsenal. They also understood that chemical disarmament cannot be undertaken against a rigid formula – least of all in the exceptional circumstances of an active conflict in which time is of the essence.

In agreeing to remove chemicals, member states set an important precedent for decisive action, true to the aims and spirit of the CWC.

Since the OPCW Executive Council's decision on an accelerated programme of destruction on 27 September last year, we have achieved the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons production capability and of all unfilled munitions.

We have also removed more than 90% of chemicals from Syrian territory and are now waiting on one last consignment in order to get destruction operations underway.

Strong support from the United Nations has been vital – both on the political front through the Security Council's adoption of resolution 2118, and in the field through the UN's provision of logistics and security support under the auspices of the OPCW-UN Joint Mission.

It is worth recalling just how responsive, cooperative and closely coordinated an international effort this has been.

The United States provided the majority of the trucks, heavy-lifting equipment, containers and packing materials required for safely loading and transporting Syrian chemicals to the port of Latakia, with Belarus, China and Russia furnishing additional support. Transportation of the chemicals within Syria has been the responsibility of the Syrian Government.

Denmark and Norway have each provided a cargo vessel and, along with Russia, China and the United Kingdom, naval escorts for the onwards transportation of chemicals from Latakia. Finland is providing a team of chemical response experts to handle any possible chemical incidents.

The Norwegian ship *Taiko* has already left the area of operation and is transporting chemicals to Finland and the United States for disposal at commercial facilities.

Once fully loaded, the Danish cargo ship *Ark Futura* will transport mustard agent and other priority chemicals to the Italian port of Gioia Tauro for trans-loading to a US vessel, the *Cape Ray*, for destruction by a process of neutralization. The resulting effluent will be stored on board the *Cape Ray* before being transported to Germany and Finland for disposal. The *Ark Futura* will also transport other material to the United Kingdom for destruction.

More than 30 member states have contributed to the trust funds for verification and destruction of Syrian chemical weapons.

It is also worth recalling that the mission in Syria is the first time the OPCW has ever worked with the international community to remove chemical weapons from a country at war and in such highly compressed timeframes.

But this experience is unique not only in the history of chemical disarmament. It is the first time that a major WMD arsenal of any sort has been subjected to complete and irreversible destruction during an active conflict.

History will, I am sure, judge this mission to be an extraordinary collective international effort and a guiding example of effective multilateralism in action.

At the same time, I am confident in the resilience of the CWC and its mechanisms in addressing any future compliance concerns.

My decision to dispatch a mission to establish the facts surrounding allegations of chlorine gas attacks in Syria is a case in point – a mission that has not been deterred by its members recently coming under fire.

The mission recently presented its preliminary report, which I have shared with member states. Information available to the team lends credence to the view that toxic chemicals, such as chlorine, have been systematically used in Syria.

In all of this, the CWC has been the only textbook we have had to guide us. And our experience so far is that, while we have had to improvise on occasion, there is no need for a new edition.

Syria's chemical demilitarization will not, of course, resolve the conflict raging in that country. But it will remove recourse to chemical weapons and, in this way, deliver a lasting security dividend to the entire region.

This would be no small achievement – one which would also serve as an investment in more broad-ranging disarmament down the track.

Certainly, the elimination of Syria's chemical weapons must be an incentive for those six countries still outside the CWC – Angola, Egypt, Israel, Myanmar, North Korea and South Sudan – to join without delay or preconditions.

And it recommends itself as a means of generating movement on a Conference on a Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction-Free Zone.

We are determined to achieve universal adherence to the CWC. For our success, as Syria has shown, can only be as broad as is our reach.

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The OPCW is an organization that is not only conscious of the success we have recorded to date – we are also eager to share it for the benefit of all humankind.

It is my fervent hope that the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to the OPCW will help reinvigorate multilateral disarmament processes more broadly, as called for by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in an address to the Conference on Disarmament on 21 January.

Calling on delegates to be inspired by the Nobel award to the OPCW, the Secretary-General urged them to "make 2014 a year of creativity and action."

Certainly, the Chemical Weapons Convention has set a high bar for new endeavours in disarmament. It has shown that multilateralism can deliver practical disarmament success, and that it must do so again.

As I mentioned earlier, there is more that we can do to convert challenges into opportunities – especially those afforded by advances in science, technology and communications – to inform new approaches.

As robust as the CWC's verification provisions are, for example, the challenge of limited physical access in Syria has allowed us to test new options, such as remote verification technology by GPS mounted video cameras.

The overwhelming amount of data conveyed by social media has also provided useful supplementation of traditional methods.

New work in verification will be vital for increasing states' confidence in the wake of a previously unsuccessful attempt to negotiate a BWC Verification Protocol and stalled movement on a fissile material production ban.

We need also to explore greater efficiencies through more thorough exchanges of ideas and best practices, especially through our interactions with arms control treaty organizations and other relevant international agencies.

The United Nations is central in this regard, whether in partnership on the ground in Syria, or in our broader, mutually reinforcing efforts to promote disarmament.

We are likewise engaging regional organizations to raise awareness of the Chemical Weapons Convention, including in helping to secure universality, as well as working with other arms control treaty organizations on new approaches in areas ranging from dual-use challenges to verification methods.

Additionally, our increasingly complex strategic environment gives us ever more pause to consider how technical expertise and knowledge can be married with policy-making skills to come up with multilateral solutions that yield practical results.

Increasingly, foreign and security policy officials and diplomats need to make special efforts to engage an ever broader set of stakeholders in international peace and security. This will require them to find a common language and common objectives with scientists and industry representatives.

This facet of multilateral deal-making is set to become only more important in light of the many non-traditional challenges crowding the multilateral agenda.

To this end, there is also scope for expanding public-private partnerships in disarmament and non-proliferation. For security is no longer the sole responsibility of governments.

We have seen how the OPCW was able to engage commercial entities to undertake destruction of industrial chemicals from Syria's weapons programme. New multilateral avenues for engaging the private sector down the track are well worth exploring.

In the same vein, globalization of trade and industry offers new opportunities for increasing the visibility of goods and technology transfers. This can only serve to improve non-proliferation measures by making them less invasive.

Finally, we also need to empower more people to engage in a broader, more honest debate about the impediments to achieving progress in disarmament.

We must question and test notions of the legitimacy of weapons that kill indiscriminately and of the role of deterrence through more informed discussion. And we must work to achieve more transparency in the policy positions that underpin them.

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In conclusion, let me return to a point I made at the outset of my remarks on the need to bridge short-term agendas and long-term vision, if we are to achieve effective forms of multilateralism.

The OPCW is at a formative point in this regard. As destruction of declared chemical weapons nears completion, we will need to redirect our priorities towards preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons into the future.

This has been a process that has been underway, in parallel to chemical disarmament. On-site inspections in chemical industrial plants, data monitoring and other verification measures have been implemented.

This is a far more complex undertaking than getting rid of existing weapons. Nonetheless, we are well prepared, based on our long-established traditions of collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders.

More than this, these traditions have been nurtured in a comprehensive regime that recognizes that durable security must be broadly based as a holistic venture.

In other words, disarmament goes hand in hand with non-proliferation to create a permanent absence of banned weapons.

At the same time, it must balance prohibition of malevolent uses of scientific knowledge with promotion of beneficial uses.

The CWC is firmly grounded in these principles. And we at the OPCW – secretariat staff and member states, alike – pride ourselves on living up to them through the diverse activities we undertake.

These range from verification of destruction, to assistance with treaty implementation – from protection against chemical attacks, to cooperation on peaceful uses of chemistry.

For true disarmament is more than securing the absence of weapons.

It must strive to create the conditions for such an absence to become a fixed cornerstone of our security – and of our prosperity.

This is the obligation that multilateral disarmament has to humanity.

This is the ambition it must set itself.

This is the goal it must achieve.

Thank you for your attention.