

Just Peace Event – Museon
The Hague as the Home to International Organisations

Director-General OPCW, Ahmet Üzümcü

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Ms Deputy Mayor,
Ms Van der Sman,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for your kind invitation to speak today.

It gives me great pleasure to join you for the inauguration of the first ever Just Peace weekend in The Hague.

The Hague has a long history in the field of peace.

The Hague Peace Conferences were held in this city in 1899 and 1907.

These conferences ushered in a new era in the history of humanity.

They tackled head on the ugly reality of war.

The mood of the time was perhaps best captured by Bertha von Suttner, the leading peace champion of the day, in her book ‘Lay Down Your Arms’ – a book displayed prominently in the “Give Peace a Chance” exhibition here at the Museon.

Most significantly for the OPCW, The Hague peace conferences recommended the prohibition of “poison and poison weapons” in the waging of war, thus setting the foundations for the Chemical Weapons Convention, the backbone of our organisation.

The countries represented at the two Hague conferences were united by the conviction that the international community needs to work together to make our world safer and more secure.

That conviction is also what unites us here today, as partners committed to peace and security.

Over a hundred years later, The Hague is home to some 200 international organisations and nearly 20,000 individuals working tirelessly towards a peaceful and safer world for everyone.

A world without oppression.

A world without chemical weapons.

A world without terrorism, money laundering and organised crime.

It is this cross-pollination of peace, justice and security that has become characteristic of The Hague and which has rightly earned it a reputation as an international city of peace and justice.

The OPCW is proud to share this commitment to peace.

We are the only international organisation responsible for implementing a ban on an entire family of weapons and our 190 members, nearly every country in the world, are committed to a world free of chemical weapons.

Since 1997, the year the Chemical Weapons Convention entered into force, the OPCW has overseen the destruction of 86% of all chemical weapons.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The story of the OPCW and that of The Hague – reminds us that peace does not just happen with the touch of a magic wand.

Achieving peace and security is hard work.

We were reminded of this during our mission to eliminate Syria's chemical weapons.

The task of destroying those weapons during a raging conflict and in highly compressed time frames was an unprecedented challenge for us.

It stretched us to new limits, demanding a great deal of professional commitment and personal courage on the part of personnel deployed to Syria.

Take, the OPCW inspectors on the ground in Syria, who for the first time in their careers had to wear bulletproof vests on top of their hazmat suits, while accessing sites in blistering 40-degree heat.

One look at the two hazmat suits provided by the OPCW, and displayed here in the Museon, is enough to understand that this was no easy task.

Sustainable peace and security also demands great commitment, co-operation and consensus from many parties.

Again, we saw this during our Syria mission.

It was an extraordinary collective effort, consisting of in-kind and financial assistance from more than 30 countries.

Closer to home, we have also been very fortunate to enjoy this strong commitment and co-operation from The Hague City Council, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as the people of The Hague.

For this, we are very grateful.

From the very beginning, you welcomed the OPCW with open arms.

You have been there for us all along: from the small fledgling organisation with borrowed furniture on Nordwaal back in 1993, to the 500-strong Nobel Peace Prize-winning organisation that we are today.

There can be no doubt - the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to OPCW last year also honours the city of The Hague. That is why we invited Mayor Van Aartsen to the prize ceremony in Oslo last year December, to represent the City of The Hague.

Durable peace and security can only be built on a culture of shared values and shared responsibility.

When it comes to chemical disarmament, the absence of war, or the threat of war, does not equate to peace – at least not in a durable, active sense.

For disarmament is not just the absence of weapons, no more than peace is just the absence of war.

That is why education is so important.

Together with institutions such as the Museon, we must push the boundaries of learning as a total experience – not only to convey information as effectively as possible, but also to directly engage people from all walks of life in what we do.

Why we do it.

And what disarmament means for all of us.

In this spirit, the OPCW is opening its doors to the public this weekend as part of The Hague International Day.

Our goal is to make everyone a stakeholder in the goal of a chemical weapons-free world.

Science centres such as this one are vital partners for organisations like our own as they reach a broad public with innovative exhibitions and cutting-edge multi-media technology.

This was what Frits van Paasschen had in mind when he initiated the Museon in 1904.

Van Paasschen's idea was to create a museum with a strong education mission. From the very start, this museum organised lessons for school classes, based on visual tools and unique historical artifacts.

To this day, the Museon has stayed true to that noble goal.

The “Give Peace a Chance Exhibition” is a case in point.

It empowers the public to engage in issues through mixed media displays and a rich collection of historical objects.

Looking ahead, let us therefore strengthen peace and security by educating and empowering.

‘Vrede en Recht’, Peace and Justice.

This is not only a motto enshrined on The Hague’s official coat of arms.

It is also what the world has come to associate The Hague with.

Let us take an example from this open and tolerant city and be realistic idealists, never allowing ourselves to be overcome by cynicism or hatred.

Let us marshal the expertise and diversity of the international organisations based in The Hague and around the world to make the world more peaceful and more secure.

Thank you.