



ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

20th International Chemical Weapons Demilitarisation Conference

London, United Kingdom

Keynote Speech by Director-General Ahmet Üzümcü

25 May 2017

REMARKS AS DELIVERED

Right Honourable Earl Howe,

Chief Executive, DSTL Jonathan Lyle,

Distinguished Participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me begin my speech today by expressing my sincere condolences to the Government, and the people of the United Kingdom, after the horrific attack in Manchester which resulted in the loss of so many innocent lives.

I am indeed very pleased to address you today at the 20th edition of the International Chemical Weapons Demilitarisation Conference which coincides with the 20th Anniversary of the entry into force of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and the establishment of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapon (OPCW) as it was mentioned earlier by the Minister.

Throughout my tenure, I have been honoured to participate almost regularly in this forum. For twenty years, this Conference has brought together leading experts, united by the common purpose of ridding the world of chemical weapons.

I wish to convey a special thanks to the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (DSTL) for once again convening this meeting. I also extend my thanks to the Government of the United Kingdom for hosting this event; and for their long standing support of the work of the OPCW.

In fact, it was here in the United Kingdom that the inaugural edition of this Conference was held, shortly after the CWC came into force.

Both the Convention and this event were founded on the fundamental belief that chemical weapons have no place in a civilized world; both were focused on the core objective of pursuing and achieving their complete elimination.

The twentieth anniversary is a landmark that inevitably evokes reflection.

All those who are directly or indirectly connected with the work of the Organisation and the goals of the Convention cannot but feel a sense of satisfaction over what has been accomplished. And rightly so. At the same time these last few years have exposed us to an intense realisation.

Even as chemical demilitarisation was once thought definable in terms of end points, we now know from experience that it is not always the case. Our mission in Syria was designed to have concluded sometime in 2014. Yet we continue to grapple with a number of difficult tasks that pose challenges both technical and political.

Compared with chemical demilitarisation, disarmament is a broader term and represents the totality of the regime established by the Convention to rid our world completely from the threat of chemical weapons. It embodies the notion of preventing the re-emergence of these weapons which has become increasingly important both on account of the progress made in demilitarisation and the unprecedented tasks that the Organisation is expected to shoulder. Today we have much greater clarity about the scope of the tasks involved in chemical disarmament. These too require full and abiding commitment.

Speaking about demilitarisation, the two largest possessor states are nearing the finish line. The Pueblo Chemical Agent Destruction Pilot Plant (PCAPP) in the United States began destruction operations in September 2016 and construction of the destruction facility at the Blue Grass Chemical Agent Destruction Pilot Plant (BGCAPP) is continuing. As at 31 April, the United States had destroyed over 90% of its declared Category 1 chemical weapons. Destruction is expected to be completed, as planned, by 2023.

Destruction at the Kizner facility in the Russian Federation continues to progress with 98% of its declared Category 1 stockpile destroyed by the end of April. Kizner is expected to complete its work earlier than the planned date of December 2020, probably next year.

The Chinese and Japanese authorities continue to work closely on the excavation, recovery, and destruction of abandoned chemical weapons at Haerbaling and six other locations.

A delegation of the OPCW Executive Council will visit Haerbaling in June to witness the progress first hand. Visits to such facilities, which are also conducted in the United States and Russia, ensure transparency in destruction efforts, and allow a better understanding of the complexities involved in chemical weapons destruction, as well as the technical and other challenges encountered.

In Iraq, the OPCW has provided training for experts in the handling of contaminated chemical weapons, sampling, and medical response. A facility agreement has been prepared, along with a detailed plan for the verification of these destruction activities.

As we reflect on the OPCW's milestones and challenges, our work in Syria emerges as an example of both the Organisation's adaptability, and the international community's commitment to uniting when needed in the cause of eradicating chemical weapons.

Despite an ongoing civil war, we undertook an ambitious chemical demilitarisation programme in 2013 to remove and destroy Syria's chemical weapons arsenal. The intricate removal and destruction process required the support of no less than 30 OPCW Member States, the European Union and the United Nations.

The Syria mission tested the organisation's responsiveness to contingencies, and set a new operational paradigm for our work. We found ourselves navigating uncharted waters; undertaking new activities that stretched the limits of our organisational capacities as well as the resilience of the Convention we implement. This unprecedented mission also provided us with new and novel approaches that can be applied elsewhere in the future.

In 2014, I established a Fact-Finding Mission to investigate allegations of use of chemical weapons in Syria. Since that time, nineteen separate missions have been deployed to look into various incidents that were reported to involve the use of toxic chemicals as weapons.

Through these missions, our experts conduct interviews, gather information, and secure environmental and biomedical samples which are then analysed by the OPCW designated laboratories.

Some of these enquiries have concluded with a high degree of confidence, that chlorine and, sulphur mustard have been used as weapons in Syria. The investigation into the widely reported incident at Khan Shaykhun is underway. In liaison with the United Nations, a possible visit to the alleged site of the incident at Khan Shaykhun is under consideration. Given the sensitivity of the mission and past experience, this visit is dependent on the availability of the most stringent security assurances for the FFM. Meanwhile, the FFM is conducting a complete analysis of the information and data at its disposal, including the results of sample analyses and mapping of the location of victims.

On 19 April, in my briefing I informed the Executive Council that the bio-medical samples collected from three victims during their autopsy and bio-medical samples from seven individuals undergoing treatment at hospitals were analysed at OPCW designated laboratories. The results of these analyses indicated exposure to Sarin or a Sarin-like substance.

The FMM missions do not attribute responsibility for the use of chemical weapons, but rather their findings contribute directly to the work of the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism, or JIM which is tasked with identifying the responsible parties.

The nature and circumstances of the various incidents looked into by the FFM have varied. Depending on these, in some cases sampling and analysis has been crucial.

Samples taken in support of these investigations are transported to the OPCW Laboratory, where each sample is split into multiple aliquots. Identical sets of samples are then sent to our partner labs for analysis. If there were conflict between the results of analyses, another set of samples would be sent to a third laboratory.

The OPCW's network of designated labs, are highly capable and are able to analyse environmental and bio-medical samples. We currently have a set of 23 labs from 17 Member States in our network; 13 of these labs are designated for both bio-medical and environmental analysis, among them the DSTL in Porton Down.

The CWC provides for investigations of alleged use of chemical weapons. On-site investigations involving technical and forensic procedures are foreseen in the concept of such investigations under the Convention.

However, given the particular circumstances and dynamics in Syria, the OPCW had to adapt. The attempt made by the Fact Finding Mission exactly 3 years ago to visit a site of an alleged incident involving the use of chlorine had to be aborted due an armed attack on the team. Under these conditions, the choice before the international community is between no investigations at all or

investigations that will apply procedures and methods suited to the difficult conditions that we are dealing with in conflict zones. Clearly, the first option of inaction would be and should be unacceptable for it would nurture impunity and cause irreparable damage to the CWC regime.

It is important to bear in mind that the international community has forcefully condemned any use of chemical weapons by anyone under any circumstances. And that both the Executive Council and the UN Security Council have by consensus recognised the facts about the use of chemical weapons in Syria. It is on account of such acknowledgment of the work of the OPCW Fact Finding Mission that the Security Council proceeded to establish the Joint Investigative Mechanism to identify the perpetrators of the attacks confirmed by the FFM.

Another complexity that continues to attend our work in Syria relates to the question of clarifying certain elements of Syria's declaration of its chemical weapons programme. The Declaration Assessment Team has been engaged with Syria in an effort to clarify several outstanding issues.

The purpose of this exercise is to arrive at a declaration that will be regarded by our States Parties as complete and accurate.

I have continued to underscore to my Syrian interlocutors the necessity of bringing this matter to a closure through the provision of scientifically and technically plausible explanations on the unresolved questions as well as access to individuals with an overarching knowledge of the Syrian chemical weapons programme.

I have also urged the Syrian Arab Republic to declare all relevant parts of the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Centre (SSRC). We will continue to address the gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies in regard to the Syrian declaration.

The Executive Council decided in November 2016 to conduct additional inspections in Syria. According to this decision, the Barzah and Jamrayah SSRC facilities are to be inspected twice a year and, when security conditions permit, the relevant sites identified in the third and fourth reports of the JIM. The first inspection was completed at both the Barzah and Jamrayah facilities in March 2017. Regarding the inspections at sites identified by the JIM in its third and fourth reports as involved in the weaponisation, storage, delivery, and use of toxic chemicals as weapons, the Secretariat will continue to monitor the security situation through the United Nations Department of Safety and Security to determine whether security conditions permit inspections at the sites in question.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we mark our 20th anniversary and approach the historic occasion of achieving the destruction of a complete category of declared weapons of mass destruction, we are looking to the future.

This imminent landmark is now within reach. The work of the Organisation will, however, continue in accordance with the permanence of the prohibitions of the CWC. The abiding norms of the Convention require us to sustain our commitment and our vigilance. As we near this milestone, it is clear that our organisation must continue to adapt to new threats, challenges and priorities.

The re-emergence of chemical weapons use, the mounting threat of chemical terrorism, and the evolution of science and technology are all shaping our future.

We must continue to progress by consolidating our gains; ensuring effective implementation of the Convention globally and by making the OPCW a global repository of knowledge and expertise with

regard to chemical weapons disarmament.

The effectiveness, credibility and confidence in our verification regime will remain at the heart of the Convention. And, its relevance will only increase in importance in the future as the Organisation shifts its focus from destroying chemical weapons to preventing their re-emergence.

We will continue to look at how we can make the best use of the knowledge, and expertise that we have developed over the twenty years.

In doing so, we need to keep abreast of developments in science and technology. For example, as this conference showcases, new and novel approaches to destruction are being explored. For our part, we are working with States Parties to develop appropriate verification methods tailored to such new methods in order to continue to provide assurances of effective verification of destruction of chemical weapons.

The OPCW Scientific Advisory Board, under the able Chairmanship of Dr Chris Timperley from DSTL, plays a vital role in assuring that developments in science and technology are taken into consideration by the OPCW.

I have recently established a Temporary Working Group of the Scientific Advisory Board to conduct an in-depth review of the methods and technologies used in our investigative work. The Group will identify the capabilities, skill sets and equipment needed to augment and strengthen the Secretariat's capacities in this area.

One of our future projects pertains to upgrading the OPCW Chemical Laboratory to a Center for Chemistry and Technology. The objective is to strengthen OPCW's Science and Technology capabilities to fully address the threat of chemical weapons, as well as to support capacity building in our States Parties. The OPCW Laboratory is, under this initiative, envisaged to be expanded and bolstered with additional capabilities benefiting from recent advances in science and technology.

The threat from non-state actors and of terrorism in particular, necessitates the OPCW to invest in strengthening our capabilities on two fronts, namely prevention, and response.

In terms of prevention, the organisation supports States Parties in enhancing chemical safety and security against the hostile use of toxic chemicals and chemical accidents. In this context, the close cooperation we enjoy with the chemical industry offers avenues that can lead to providing States Parties with useful information and existing best practices in chemical safety and security.

In the tragic event of a chemical weapons incident, rapid and effective response measures must be in place to mitigate the devastating impacts on human life and the environment. We work extensively with States Parties to ensure that adequate emergency response capacities are in place in the unfortunate event that the need arises.

As part of such preparedness, we have established a Rapid Response and Assistance Mission (RRAM). The RRAM can be deployed upon request from States Parties to provide emergency assistance in the case of a chemical weapons attack.

Comprised of a group of experts from the OPCW, the Team's capabilities would be customized to meet the relevant needs of a range of different contingencies, including detecting toxic chemicals, administering guidance for the treatment of victims, and securing an area for forensic examination.

Importantly, the Team would support a State Party in coordinating efforts with the United Nations and other relevant bodies.

In January, we tested the RRAM at a table-top exercise held in the framework of the UN Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (UNCTITF) at OPCW headquarters.

To prevent the re-emergence of chemical weapons, we require the participation and contribution of new audiences. To this end, OPCW and its States Parties have established an Advisory Board on Education and Outreach to extend our reach to a broad new set of stakeholders.

By building new channels for outreach, we hope to instil the next generation of scientists, educators, researchers and diplomats with a sense of ownership in the Convention's aims and objectives.

It cannot be argued that the road ahead will be free of challenges. However, twenty years of implementing the Chemical Weapons Convention have clearly demonstrated that the OPCW possesses the agility and resolve to adapt to contingencies far beyond what was originally imagined.

The near universal support for the Convention underscores the enduring global endorsement of the ban on chemical weapons, and the strength and abiding relevance of the OPCW's mission.

I would like to conclude by commending all of those, like you, who have dedicated themselves to the noble pursuit of the eradication of chemical weapons. Our progress would not be possible without this vital work and commitment.

The Chemical Weapons Convention and the OPCW constitute one of history's most successful multilateral institutions and represent a landmark endeavour in the story of global disarmament. It is now up to all of us as global citizens to keep moving together on a path that protects the norm, strengthens our cooperation and thereby preserves the value of the Convention as essential for a peaceful and secure future.

I thank you for your attention.