

**"Measuring Progress on Global Chemical Disarmament:
Successes and Future Challenges"**

**Remarks by Director-General at
University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences**

Ahmet Üzümcü

Director-General, OPCW

26 May 2015

Excellencies,

Faculty Members and Students,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am very pleased to address you this afternoon at the University of Ljubljana.

Your university is renowned not only as the oldest and largest centre of higher learning in Slovenia, but also internationally noted for its high quality academic programmes in the arts, sciences and technology.

My time with you this afternoon comes during my first official visit to Slovenia as Director-General of the OPCW.

It also happens at a time of significant milestones for your country and our work to build a future free of the scourge of chemical weapons.

Next year, Slovenia will mark a quarter century since achieving independence.

Over that time, your country has made remarkable strides in advancing peace and prosperity for its people.

In short order, Slovenia instituted a democratic system of governance and joined the European Union.

It has also notched an impressive record in its standing as a responsible global citizen, including in relation to the disarmament and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Slovenia was among the first countries to join the Chemical Weapons Convention, a landmark international treaty that bans an entire class of weapons of mass destruction under international verification.

In doing so, Slovenia became a member of the OPCW, the international organisation that, from our headquarters in The Hague, oversees implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

The OPCW reaches across borders and boundaries to ensure that clear lines are drawn between the malevolent and benevolent uses of chemistry.

As Slovenia approaches its milestone anniversary next year, I would note a recent event that is of particular importance to the OPCW.

Last month, we marked the hundredth anniversary of the first large-scale chemical attack near Ieper in Belgium in April 1915.

We commemorated this tragic event in history with a meeting of our States Parties in Ieper.

This meeting honoured the memory of the many victims of these terrible weapons.

It also served to remind us of the long road we have travelled in preventing humanity from ever again experiencing the torment of chemical weapons.

And we used this occasion to issue the historic Ieper Declaration, in which our States Parties reaffirmed their commitment to rid the world of chemical weapons.

From the time of their first use in World War I, chemical weapons have been used on nearly all continents, in numerous conflicts, all with disastrous consequences.

Perhaps most commonly known for their widespread use in World War I, chemical weapons have claimed countless lives, including innocent civilians, right up until modern time.

The Iran-Iraq War witnessed especially brutal regular use of such weapons,

Yet use of these weapons has not been limited to conflicts between states.

A doomsday cult diffused the deadly nerve agent sarin in the Tokyo subway 20 years ago.

The legacy of chemical weapons even extends to Slovenia, as World War I-era chemical weapons – so-called “old chemical weapons” – were found and destroyed on Slovenian territory in recent years.

From the outset, chemical weapons have been characterized as inhumane.

Their impact – suffocating, burning, blinding and incapacitating victims – has inspired dread and fear.

These weapons respect neither borders between nations, nor the conventional rules of warfare.

And, because their dissemination cannot be closely regulated, chemical weapons kill indiscriminately.

Throughout the Cold War, tens of thousands of tonnes of nerve agent were amassed.

And to give you a sense of just how deadly chemical weapons can be, consider that a single drop of nerve agents, like sarin, can kill an adult instantly.

We have seen the tragic impact of sarin on civilians during an August 2013 attack in the Damascus suburb of Ghouta.

As we continue to learn of allegations of the use of toxic agents as weapons in the region – reports which have been substantiated in part by an ongoing OPCW Fact-Finding Mission – we are all too aware that our work to banish these weapons is yet unfinished.

It is worth recalling, in this context, how we have come to ensure that a century-long history of tragic chemical warfare is nearing conclusion with the expected realisation of global chemical disarmament.

And further, to denote some of the key challenges to ensuring that chemical weapons never re-emerge.

Slovenia is one of 190 States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention – a treaty that commits countries to a ban on the production, use, storage and transfer of such weapons.

Opened for signature in 1993 and brought into force four years later, the Convention is a uniquely successful instrument of disarmament.

The Convention not only commits its adherents to the complete abolishment of an entire class of weapons of mass destruction – but also does so in a manner that is credible, safe and verifiable.

It further seeks to accomplish this comprehensive ban in an even-handed fashion.

Unlike the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the Convention does not allow certain States to retain weapons while denying the privilege to others.

Under the Convention, no State Party may possess chemical weapons – any that do have such weapons must declare and destroy them under stringent OPCW verification.

Should any State Party be suspected of concealing its possession of chemical weapons, the Convention allows for what is termed a ‘challenge inspection,’ whereby credible charges of non-compliance with the treaty can be investigated by the OPCW.

The Convention’s requirements go well beyond declarations and inspections, however.

Members of the Convention are obliged to provide assistance to one another in the event that they should come under attack from chemical weapons.

Further, to harness and promote peaceful applications of chemistry, the Convention facilitates international cooperation among its members.

Activities in this area include creating training opportunities, strengthening laboratory capacity, facilitating professional exchange and more generally supporting research in peaceful uses of chemistry around the globe.

In support of these activities and our other core functions, we are strengthening our partnerships with international organisations, industry and scientific associations.

And in terms of developing best practices, the OPCW is working with our members and industry to develop ethical guidelines for chemical professionals – an initiative that is gathering momentum.

All this activity is ultimately directed at enhancing implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention at the national level.

As testament to your country's commitment to ensuring robust implementation of the Convention, the Government of Slovenia is hosting a meeting this week for the National Authorities of States Parties in Eastern Europe.

At this meeting, over twenty regional States Parties have convened to discuss the current status of implementation of the Convention in the region, and to further foster regional cooperation to enhance this status.

An important aspect of these meetings is the chance to exchange best practices including on outreach to universities and educational institutions, such as the University of Ljubljana.

We want future generations of diplomats, scientists and engineers to remain aware of the potential for chemistry to be misused.

I firmly believe that it is a core responsibility of the OPCW to work with States Parties to engage centres of scientific discovery and innovation to this end.

The OPCW and its States Parties have recorded remarkable progress, which can best be recounted in a few facts and figures.

190 countries, representing 98% of the world's population, have signed on to the Convention.

Eight countries have declared possession of chemical weapons.

Three of our States Parties have completely destroyed their declared stockpiles, namely Albania, India, and a State Party that prefers not to be identified.

Iraq has prepared a destruction program for remnants of chemical weapons on its territory, and Libya has eliminated its chemical weapons – with only a modest amount of component chemicals left for destruction.

In a remarkably short period of time, 98% of Syria's chemical weapons have been destroyed, including all of its stocks of sulfur mustard and sarin precursor chemicals.

Countries with by far the largest share of the world's chemical weapons stockpile – Russia and the United States – have committed to complete destruction of their programs by 2020 and 2023, respectively.

All told, nearly 90% of the world's declared chemical weapons stocks have so far been destroyed under OPCW verification.

We expect to achieve the complete destruction of all remaining chemical weapons stockpiles well within the next eight years.

When fully realized, this will represent an unprecedented achievement in multilateral disarmament.

Yet despite these impressive facts and figures, there is more work to be done and new challenges to address.

Though the vast majority of States are part of the Convention, six States remain outside the Chemical Weapons Convention.

It is critical that these countries join the Convention at the earliest possible opportunity.

We are optimistic that three of them – Angola, Myanmar and South Sudan – will become members of the Convention in the near term.

The remaining three – Egypt, Israel and North Korea – represent more challenging prospects for joining the Convention.

We nonetheless take every opportunity to advocate and call upon all States to join without delay.

A universal Chemical Weapons Convention would be the best guarantor to a robust disarmament and non-proliferation regime – one that would have an unequivocally positive impact on regional and global security.

Beyond universality, another challenge we face is from the threat of non-state actors, especially terrorist groups.

In recent years, we have witnessed the disturbing determination of motivated groups to plan and carry out acts of terror.

Today's news reports are rife with stories of terror groups seeking to acquire and use weapons of mass destruction, including chemical weapons.

These are threats to be taken very seriously.

I have mentioned the deadly attacks undertaken by the Aum Shinrikyo cult in Japan.

These attacks, using hydrogen cyanide and sarin, resulted in the tragic deaths of twenty people and injuries to thousands more.

Yet the results of these attacks could have been far more catastrophic, had they been implemented differently.

And we have seen, more recently, how widely traded industrial chemicals, such as chlorine, have been used as weapons in Syria.

This serves as a clarion call to the international community, reminding us that we must remain vigilant and not only prepare for chemical terror attacks but also work to deny terrorists access to such weapons.

Put simply, the threat of chemical weapons in the hands of terrorists should be a concern for all States, no matter the region.

How we thwart or mitigate the effects of such attacks represents one of our biggest challenges.

Finally, let me recount some of the challenges that the OPCW has faced in its mission to eliminate the Syrian chemical weapons programme.

As I mentioned earlier, we have verified that 98% of the Syrian declared stockpile has been eradicated – often amid dangerous circumstances.

With support from the UN and contributions from more than 30 countries, the Syria mission confronted the OPCW with an extraordinary set of challenges and complexities.

Never before had our staff worked amid an active conflict in such compressed timeframes.

Beyond removing and destroying chemical weapons, we are making good progress in destroying declared chemical weapons production facilities in Syria.

And we are still working to clarify some aspects of Syria's declaration.

You are probably aware that troubling new allegations have surfaced that toxic chemicals are still being used as a weapon in Syria.

Our Fact-Finding Mission is busy collecting and reviewing information relating to these allegations.

Established one year ago, the mission substantiated earlier claims of use of chlorine as a weapon and continues to discharge its duties with the support of States Parties.

A recent United Nations Security Council resolution 2209 (2015) has further buttressed the support of the international community for this important work.

The remarkable achievements of the Syria mission have depended precisely on this level of support.

It manifested itself consistently throughout the mission in the generous in-kind and financial assistance provided by States Parties.

And it showed that the unanimity against the use of chemical weapons has by no means diminished over time.

The international community's revulsion against these weapons, and our commitment to eradicate them, remains firm and undaunted.

It is this global commitment that provides the foundation for our unstinting efforts to achieve global chemical disarmament.

This same commitment will need to extend to prevent any future re-emergence of these heinous weapons.

Achievement of these two aims – completing chemical disarmament while preventing re-emergence of these weapons – remains the OPCW's overarching mission.

With the continued commitment of our States Parties and support from the next generation of leaders from universities such as yours, I am confident we will achieve our aims towards a world free of chemical weapons.

Thank you.