

**Wilton Park Event “100 years of Chemical Weapons and the Future of the OPCW”**

**British Embassy, The Hague  
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**Ahmet Üzümcü, Director-General of the OPCW**

Excellencies,  
Dear colleagues,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank, Dr Smith for organising this timely event.

Wilton Park has established something of a tradition for us, having provided a forum for debating future directions in chemical disarmament.

I wish also to thank Ambassador Adams for hosting this meeting.

I appreciate Prof. Spiers for sharing his thoughts with us, which, I am sure, will stimulate discussions.

Discussions here today will go a long way towards informing the historic transition process already underway at the OPCW.

Where we go next, as destruction targets are met and we address a shifting strategic landscape, is a question on all of our minds.

It is this question which I will address in my remarks today.

But before I do so, let me sketch out some fundamentals about what it is we do, and what has shaped our working methods to date.

I will then outline some of the challenges ahead, and what I think are the areas in which we need to either consolidate or adapt, if we are to meet these challenges in a robust way.

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When people ask me what sort of an organisation the OPCW is, I have no hesitation in responding: we are a **security organisation**.

This fundamental purpose will not change, however much the focus of our activities changes.

Whether related to disarmament, non-proliferation, assistance and protection or cooperation on peaceful uses of chemistry, all our efforts contribute to an overarching mission.

That mission is to enhance global peace and security by “exclud[ing] completely the possibility of the use of chemical weapons,” as stated in the preamble to the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Related to this, our effectiveness as a security organisation will continue to depend on our **holistic approach** to security.

The areas of activity under the familiar four pillars I just mentioned are not free-standing, but mutually reinforcing.

We have never been in the business of only getting rid of chemical weapons.

Our mission is also to ensure that such weapons are not re-built, that their impact can be mitigated, and that the benefits of applications in chemistry can be enjoyed by all.

Only by working tirelessly, and simultaneously, in all four of these areas can we prevent chemical weapons from re-emerging.

Apart from the nature and methodology of our organisation, a third underlying fundamental is the strong **convergence of interests** on chemical disarmament and security issues.

It has allowed us to build the robust regime that we have today.

And to do so on the basis of consensus which, over our eighteen-year history, has not compromised or diminished a high level of ambition.

In other words, our lowest common denominator has always been remarkably high.

This dynamic – far from common in multilateralism – was only all too evident in the course of the historic effort to eliminate Syria's chemical weapons programme.

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So, given these robust fundamentals, the question we have to ask ourselves is how do we remain fit for purpose into the future?

Clearly, we don't need to fix what is not broken.

But we will need to do some tinkering, given the **challenges ahead**.

Challenges which I would divide into two sets – one external, the other internal.

**External challenges** relate squarely to the rapidly changing threat posed by chemical weapons.

Over the past century, we have seen chemical weapons stigmatised to the point that we can now hardly imagine States ever using them again.

But, more recently, we have seen how non-state actors have been attracted to chemical weapons – precisely because they are universally regarded as taboo.

This means that the threat of chemical attacks has not only shifted – it has also mutated, alarmingly, in ways that current non-proliferation regimes are ill-equipped to address.

At the same time, rapid advances in science, technology and communications are making the task of preventing proliferation all the more difficult.

In combination, these new realities confront us with some fundamental questions.

How do we prevent terrorists from acquiring know-how through intangible transfers, such as the Internet?

What can be done to stop widely traded industrial chemicals from being used as weapons?

Where in the chemical life cycle can we use the Convention to enhance domestic controls among our States Parties in relation to non-state actors?

And how can we use, and perhaps even adapt, our robust verification regime to capture the proliferation activities of non-state actors?

These are the sort of questions that the Technical Secretariat is scoping out in a paper which will shortly be circulated to inform our deliberations on the terrorist threat.

**Internal challenges** relate to how we re-cast and service our mission in the post-destruction phase – at a time when there is a very real risk of support for it being eroded.

This is more than a question of how we best retain expertise, manage knowledge and deploy our resources, once our verification activities are no longer focused on destruction.

We need also to think about how we engage with each other, and our key stakeholders, to maintain support for what will be a less visible and much harder task – preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons.

To this end, key questions must address how we brand our mission in a persuasive way, and what new constituencies we might need to engage.

And we need to agree on new priorities in backstopping our disarmament gains – priorities that will determine the direction of resources and policy focus in a tight fiscal environment.

We should also ensure that we do not duplicate other institutions or processes.

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So what does this all mean for our **future success**? And how can we measure such success?

I don't have a blueprint for this, although the Technical Secretariat has sought to map out some of the things we are thinking about in our future vision paper, "The OPCW in 2025."

What I would like to do here is to offer some suggestions along the lines of **continuity and change**, which might help frame your discussions – as, I hope, the vision paper will also.

First and foremost, the three fundamentals I mentioned must remain at the core of our efforts to make our disarmament gains permanent.

Our effectiveness as a security organisation will continue to depend on a holistic approach and a practical sense of common purpose.

There will, of course, be approaches on which States Parties will have differences of opinion as the focus of our post-destruction activity shifts.

And we should not be afraid of such differences being aired, as long as this is part of an open, forward leaning, broad minded and, above all, well-informed debate.

While I will continue to advocate for a consensus decision-making, consensus should not be at the expense of undermining our strategic goals, or our effectiveness and relevance as an organisation. It should not lower our common denominators either.

Such a price will always be too high.

It is worth reminding ourselves that the changing threat posed by chemical terrorism may affect us all.

Terrorism, like the dispersal of chemical weapons, knows no borders, and it is in this area that national interests will continue to coalesce.

Another area which will remain core, but could stand some adjustment, is how we manage our expertise in **chemical demilitarisation**.

Such expertise will remain an ongoing requirement as important work continues to destroy abandoned chemical weapons, as some of you recently saw in China, and old chemical weapons, as they are discovered.

At the same time, the Syria mission has jolted us into enhancing our approach to contingency planning in this area.

And rightly so, for opportunities to remove and destroy a chemical arsenal must be seized, however rare.

To this end, we must retain relevant expertise to permit us to react quickly to future contingencies – especially if we consider production facilities and stockpiles that could be potentially declared by new members.

In this regard, while Myanmar, Angola and South Sudan are likely to join the Convention in the very near future, Egypt, Israel and North Korea remain hard cases.

We must increase our contacts with these countries, making it abundantly clear that no country can harbour the option of chemical weapons – tacitly, or otherwise.

At the same time, **universality** must be seen in qualitative terms no less than in quantitative terms.

Our international cooperation activities must, as an ongoing priority, raise the level of **national implementation**, especially among those States Parties that have so far failed to enact implementing legislation.

Had the Convention been in force before the Tokyo subway attacks in 1995, Japanese authorities would have had a sound legal basis for prosecuting Aum Shinrikyo for its proliferation activities before the group was able to successfully manufacture sarin. Hence, these attacks could have been prevented according to some experts.

We need also to think about how we can tighten domestic controls that fall within the purview of the Convention, especially in relation to combatting terrorism.

These could range from physical protection of toxic chemical production and storage sites, to reviewing domestic regulations governing supply of chemicals – measures which our forthcoming paper will address.

In all this, we need to remind ourselves that we can only ultimately be as strong as our weakest link, especially in the face of the documented use of such widely traded chemicals as chlorine as a weapon.

If some of the verification-related elements I have listed here can be regarded as the **hard power** of the OPCW, we need to consider more effective forms of **soft power** to complement them.

Promotion of international cooperation in peaceful uses of chemistry will remain core in this regard.

But we also need to think more imaginatively about how we undertake education and outreach as a way of broadening our community of stakeholders such as the scientific societies, industry, academia, the civil society in general.

The establishment of an Advisory Board on Education and Outreach will help fuel new strategies and activities in this regard.

Further, a qualitatively different **relationship with industry** would help position us better.

In my view, we need to see this a little more keenly from industry's perspective – namely, how industry might see corporate reputational value in associating itself with our future priorities.

And we then need to create mechanisms to engage industry in defining some of these priorities.

Finally, we should not lose sight of the fact that other international organisations are facing similar challenges.

We need to improve our **interoperability**, especially in relation to deployments of inspectors and experts.

This especially applies to the IAEA and WHO, both of whom we have cooperated with closely in the Syria mission and the preceding UN investigation into alleged uses of chemical weapons.

But we also need to exchange information and best practices in a broad range of other areas, from verification methodology to public diplomacy.

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To wrap up, I think it is true to say we have all been a little startled by the heightened public profile that the OPCW has enjoyed over the past year and a half – although I am equally sure we have all welcomed it.

But we shouldn't lose sight of the fact that this profile has been acquired on the basis of the business we are slowly getting out of, namely, the elimination of declared stockpiles of chemical weapons.

We now need to create a profile for ourselves that lives beyond the headlines – one that speaks to more people in ways that can attract support for our recalibrated mission.

That is why I deliberately spoke earlier of our *future* success.

Because of the new challenges ahead, this success will be different from the success we have enjoyed to date.

Which is why we need to plan for it, and account for it in a results-based fashion, to ensure chemical weapons truly become a thing of the past.

Thank you.