



ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

19th Annual Meeting of National Authorities of States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention

Remarks by Director General Ahmet Üzümcü

OPCW Headquarters

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REMARKS AS DELIVERED

Excellencies,
Distinguished participants,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to welcome you to the 19th Annual Meeting of National Authorities of States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention. This meeting is a highly valued fixture on the OPCW calendar. It provides a forum for you to compare notes, share experiences, expand networks, and deepen cooperation at all levels.

The participation by representatives from 132 States Parties from all geographical regions amply demonstrates the importance that is placed on this event.

I am especially pleased to welcome representatives from the OPCW partner organisations: the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Organisation of American States, the RACVIAC – Centre for Security Cooperation, and the International Council of Chemical Association (ICCA).

Your attendance here demonstrates the ongoing spirit of collaboration that your organisations have shown in advancing our common objectives of peace and security.

Ladies and gentlemen,

2017 has been a milestone year. In April we marked the twentieth anniversary of the entry into force of the CWC and the founding of the OPCW. To date nearly 40 events have taken place in States Parties. These events have successfully raised awareness about the work of the OPCW and the goals of the Convention. I thank all those who organised or participated in them.

Today, the Convention remains the cornerstone of the international community's commitment to eliminating the scourge of chemical weapons.

Impressive progress has been made under the Convention in its relatively short history. More than 96% of some 72,000 tons of declared chemical warfare agents have been destroyed under the OPCW's verification. This is a momentous achievement and a tangible contribution to global peace and security.

The Convention's international verification regime remains the gold standard among multilateral disarmament agreements. With nearly 3,500 industry inspections, the regime is a tried and tested tool for promoting confidence in compliance with the Convention. Our ability to monitor and inspect destruction of chemical weapons as well as inspections at the chemical industry – in a professional and partial manner – has been vital for building confidence in our work, as well as between our Member States.

That high level of confidence in the CWC is reflected in its near universal adherence. 192 countries are States Parties to the Convention, accounting for 98% of the world's population. Only four countries in the world continue as non-states parties.

At its core, the Convention owes its success to the dedication of its States Parties, and to the tireless efforts of their National Authorities. Indeed, your efforts guide and enforce what determines our success – namely, the implementation of the Convention within your national jurisdictions. At this time of historic transition for the OPCW, your work is set only to increase in importance.

As we shift our focus away from the destruction of chemical weapons, National Authorities will play a frontline role in new efforts to prevent the re-emergence of such weapons. This has become particularly important in view of the increasing threat of chemical weapons use by non-state actors.

Now, more than at any other time in our history, we need to strengthen the links in our global implementation chain.

First and foremost, we must identify the weak links in that chain and act to reinforce them. This, of course, means working to persuade the four countries still outside the Convention – Egypt, Israel, North Korea and South Sudan – to join without delay. But we must also strive to ensure that our existing 192 States Parties have baseline standards in place for implementation.

In that regard I would like to welcome the joint statement on chemical weapons from the East Asia Summit on 14 November, which recognises the OPCW's efforts in CWC implementation. The statement also acknowledges the importance of attaining CWC universalisation, improving national implementation, and meeting ongoing challenges posed by chemical weapons, imposed by State and non-state actors.

The countries also reaffirmed their commitment to the CWC and pledged further support to its implementation across all pillars.

For its part, the Technical Secretariat has sought to do this by working with Member States to identify their specific needs, and to tailor our capacity-building and training programmes accordingly. Despite these efforts, only 122 of the 192 States parties have national legislation covering all initial measures. 70 States Parties are in various stages of developing and adopting implementing legislation.

It is for this reason that the Technical Secretariat extends legislative and capacity building support to States Parties. The National Authorities are the focal points for these efforts, which aim to boost national capacities for fulfilling the obligations of the Convention. This year we organized Stakeholders Forums on the adoption of legislation for States Parties in the African, Asian, and GRULAC regions. The purpose of these forums was to enhance awareness and understanding of the CWC, especially the urgent need to adopt national legislation. It is our hope that the stakeholder forums may provide the final push for States Parties to finalise their implementation measures.

The CWC also provides a platform for cooperation among States Parties to promote peaceful use of chemistry for sustainable development of developing States Parties. Yesterday the second edition of the Review and Evaluation Workshop of the Components of an Agreed Framework for the Full Implementation of Article XI was held. This was an opportunity to share national and regional experiences, priorities and to discuss ways and means to promote effective implementation of Article XI.

Ladies and gentlemen,

To allow us to fine-tune our capacity-building and training programmes, it is vital that National Authorities provide feedback to the Secretariat.

We also rely on your connections to regional and sub-regional organisations to add value and reach to our capacity-building efforts by drawing on the resources of these organisations.

This is why a coordination meeting was jointly organized by the Technical Secretariat with the African Union Commission at its headquarters in Addis Ababa. At this meeting our primary objective was to strengthen cooperation with international partners and regional economic communities on issues related to CWC implementation. The meeting allowed for better coordination of efforts of all partners in terms of their contribution to implementation issues, especially as they concern the OPCW Africa Programme.

In addition to comprehensive national implementing legislation, National Authorities have to ensure proper maintenance and utilization of trained personnel. It is important that knowledge and experiences are shared with peers back home in order to construct the institutional capacity to develop pools of expertise for implementing the CWC.

For effective implementation of the Convention, it is vital to build up relations of trust and strong networks with all relevant stakeholders. In their daily activities, National Authorities have to increase their engagement with representatives from the chemical industry, customs authorities, and the scientific community. Engagement such as this will offer an opportunity to apply a more forward-looking focus to the Organization's future priorities and challenges.

Closer interaction with industry and the scientific establishment will be particularly important if we are to successfully broaden our defence against chemical weapons in the post-destruction phase.

This is crucial for the effective implementation of the Convention. Cooperation with the International Council of Chemical Association (ICCA) has contributed well to this effort. It is important that the chemical industry is aware of and understands the obligations that flow from the CWC. Only through this will industry be able to effectively contribute and fulfil its requirements in cooperation with the National Authorities.

Accordingly, we have included a half-day industry segment in the programme to facilitate discussion and exchange of view for effective cooperation between National Authorities and industry. The segment will provide opportunities to explore ways to improve coordination and interaction.

Cooperation with other stakeholders that have a stake in the implementation of the Convention is also important. A very good example is the memorandum of understanding that the OPCW signed with the World Customs Organization earlier this year. The MoU has paved the way for closer cooperation on issues related to the control of the trade in toxic chemicals. This cooperation includes the mutual participation of experts in joint initiatives and in capacity-building events, which are crucial to strengthening the non-proliferation regime.

An important and concrete development in OPCW's assistance to member states is the establishment of the Rapid Response and Assistance Mission under article X of the Convention.

The RRAM is set in place to assist States Parties, upon their request, in case of an attack or threat of an attack with chemical weapons by terrorists. It has held its first exercise and a second is about to take place in December.

In closing, I would like to mention education and outreach.

Education and outreach will continue to play an essential role in enhancing the understanding and awareness of the Convention. In this regard, the Advisory Board on Education and Outreach is essential for providing us with the strategic guidance.

Ladies and gentlemen,

With the total elimination of the declared chemical weapons stockpiles in sight, the OPCW's future priorities will demand a range of activities to ensure that the CWC remains the permanent barrier against chemical weapons. We will continue working together to find effective solutions to emerging challenges and relying on the key norms enshrined in the Chemical Weapons Convention to do so.

National Authorities are perpetually on the frontline of efforts to prevent the re-emergence of chemical weapons. It is they who must directly tackle the new challenges from the development in science and technology and the rising threat from non-state actors. The States Parties inputs to the ongoing discussions on these issues are therefore fundamental.

It is my hope that though the work undertaken by the National Authorities we will be able to further enhance the implementation of the Convention at all levels and offer solutions to the looming challenges. Effective national implementation of the Convention will enhance our ability to maintain our expertise, capacity, and resources, as well as ensure the resilience of the CWC regime well into the future.

I look forward to your deliberations this week and wish you an informative and productive meeting.

Thank you.
