



ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

Keynote Speech

by the Director-General of the OPCW, Ambassador Ahmet Üzümcü

At the Wilton Park Conference: The CWC – the Fourth Review Conference and Beyond

Reflections on the Future of the OPCW

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REMARKS AS DELIVERED

Excellencies,
Distinguished participants,
Dear colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I wish to thank the Foreign & Commonwealth Office of the United Kingdom and the Federal Foreign Office of Germany for sponsoring this conference which is both important and timely given the significance of the Fourth Review Conference to be held later this year. I would also like to extend my sincere appreciation to the staff of Wilton Park for their hard work and excellent preparations for this meeting.

I will use this opportunity to outline the progress we have made in preparing the OPCW for its prospective role and the areas where work is needed in order to ensure a strong Organisation that continues to serve the goals for which it was created.

It was nearly 21 years ago that the CWC entered into force and with it an era of renewed expectations.

The hopes were not confined to the prospect of a world that was finally rid of an abhorrent means of warfare but one in which the larger endeavour for disarmament bore fruit.

After all if the international community could agree to ban a class of weapons that had brought untold suffering in so many wars and conflicts, why should it not extend the consensus to other means of warfare that threatened the very survival of life as we know it. While previously such aspirations tended to evoke scepticism if not outright dismissal as mere utopia, the CWC demonstrated the possibilities. That is why the Convention is rightly regarded as a ground-breaking development in the history of disarmament.

While a stalemate in disarmament prevails in general, the CWC on its own has proven its success and continues to offer a model for emulation. Facts and figures speak for themselves as do the challenging assignments carried out by the Organisation such as the chemical demilitarisation mission in Syria.

At the same time, we need to take into account the fact that the quarter of a century since the Convention was negotiated has been a period of incomparable technological innovation. The speed of change has also changed the way we think about security.

In 2010 when I took over as Director-General, it was already evident to me that global developments on the one hand and progress on demilitarisation on the other had created the conditions where we needed to prepare and adapt to change. Since then, apart from dealing with some of the most challenging missions ever assigned to the OPCW, a considerable part of our effort has gone into reordering our priorities. This also meant effectively addressing the scepticism that inevitably attends most initiatives designed to alter the comfort of business as usual.

Progress in chemical demilitarisation has of course been a visible and readily quantifiable achievement of the CWC regime. But it is this success that ironically gave rise to questions about the cost-benefit value of the Organisation in the post-destruction phase.

A major part of our resources had been dedicated to verifying the destruction of chemical weapons. With fewer weapons remaining to be destroyed, a significant part of our operational capacity faced redundancy. The temptation to down size the Organisation appeared an attractive proposition especially in the wake of the worst financial crisis the world had seen since the Great Depression.

The OPCW is however an Organisation with a unique mission. It exists in order to protect and to strengthen a norm. This is putting it simply. What lies behind that norm is a complex treaty with several inter-connected parts all of which must function in tandem and in optimal fashion for sustained progress.

Over the years the OPCW has built up specialised skills, knowledge and expertise that is unique and specific to its mission. These are not available across the shelf in the open market. Any arbitrary or mechanical reductions can lead to a severe loss in these assets and therefore in the capacity to fulfill defined goals. Maintaining a robust and efficient Organisation to guarantee that mechanisms to promote the norm and to enforce the prohibition are available to the international community are at the heart of the OPCW project. The challenge before us therefore was to bring about needed structural change to cater to a lower resource base while fully preserving the integrity of the compliance regime of the Convention as well as the ability to conduct contingency operations.

The other major factor is and remains the transformation in the Organisation's external environment. While the disarmament part of the mission of the OPCW was nearing completion, preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons and dealing with new unprecedented threats was acquiring much greater importance. Terrorism is just one example of issues that occupy our attention today but was hardly on the minds of the drafters of the Convention.

And yet another factor affecting decision making relates to the objective of universality of the Convention. Over the years the membership of the CWC has grown steadily to a point where we can claim near universal adherence. However, there remained and still are some significant absences. We cannot do away with the capacity to carry out verification of destruction in the case of certain States not Party joining the Convention and declaring chemical weapons programmes. This became evident at a time when existential questions were being raised about the future of the Organisation and Syria joined the Convention and declared its chemical weapons programme.

In short, despite its origins in the Cold War era and therefore an orientation that addressed issues of the time, the Convention was also drafted as a comprehensive treaty to deal with the threat of chemical weapons in all its manifestations and for all times to come.

Today, we are acutely aware of the fact that not only have old threats not completely disappeared there are new challenges that require collective, coordinated action between governments, international organisations and the civil society institutions.

I established an Advisory Panel on Future Priorities of the OPCW in 2010 to conduct an in-depth review of the operation of the Convention in this new environment.

The recommendations of the Advisory Panel remain relevant and have provided impetus to a dialogue that has, among other things, seen the work of the Open Ended Working Group on Future Priorities about which you will hear in the coming days from its two Co-chairs. The process will hopefully lead to productive discussions and a positive outcome of the Fourth Review Conference.

What we can say as of now is that the road map for the future has acquired much clarity as we have been able to give shape and content to a vision that will serve the norms of the Convention well into the future.

I will enumerate the areas we focused on and the progress made both in terms of a policy framework as well as institutional change. The first order of business was to ensure that in reordering our priorities, preventing re-emergence of chemical weapons would become the defining feature of the security part of our mission.

Prevention is by definition a broad and complex undertaking. It includes the phenomenon of continuing advances in science and technology on the one hand and crafting responses to new security challenges on the other. Instead of a sequential approach, work was needed on multiple fronts and simultaneously.

For example, the global chemical industry makes a major contribution to economic growth. The industry already has programmes for self-regulation such as the Responsible Care Programme. It also undergoes national audits. We have an institutional arrangement with the chemical industry that facilitates a constructive continuing dialogue.

From the perspective of the Convention there remains a need for vigilance in view of rapid advances in science and technology that are constantly changing the face of the industry.

The Convention assigns this function to the OPCW Scientific Advisory Board. There was a need to elevate the discussions in the Board so that its work was responsive to issues of contemporary importance. Both the Secretariat and the Board were tasked with conducting different studies on scientific and technological issues with possible impact on the Convention and the results can be seen in the form of reports of high quality and substance. It is my hope that the Board's report to the Fourth Review Conference will get the attention that it deserves as a valuable input in its deliberations.

There tends to be a negative association between progress in science and its potential for circumventing the Convention. This need not be the case. New methods and technologies can significantly improve our verification regime and also the protection measures. Their effective harnessing promises the ability to detect the presence of chemical warfare agents through improved sample collection and analysis. Sampling and analysis have been crucial in our recent missions to

determine the validity of allegations of use of chemical weapons.

In order to delve deeper into this area, I have recently established a Temporary Working Group of the Scientific Advisory Board. Its work relates to the ability of the Organisation to review methods and technologies used in our investigative assignments and therefore prepare us better for contingency operations of the sort that we carried out recently.

I have also sought through a new initiative to upgrade the OPCW Chemical Laboratory to a Center for Chemistry and Technology. The aim is for this Centre to serve our goals of capacity building in States Parties and to augment the Organisation's technical and scientific capacity to fully address the threat of chemical weapons. Focus on training and research will be important undertakings for the Center.

Again, as regards science and the concerns about its potential negative impact on the Convention, we have sought to engage the very people who can ensure that their vocations remain dedicated to peaceful activities. Our outreach efforts have extended to crucial audiences as we seek to deepen our relationships with key partners in science, academia and industry as well as with civil society and non-governmental organisations. NGO's now regularly address our annual Conferences.

Such initiatives have not only helped raise awareness about the work of the Organisation, they serve the objective of nurturing a culture of responsible science in research institutions, universities, and in schools. In order to impart a more permanent quality to outreach, the Advisory Board on Education and Outreach was established in 2016. This body will have an important role to play in promoting the goals of the Convention around the world.

For the most part since its creation, the work of the OPCW remained out of international limelight. This changed in 2013 when the Organisation was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize – quite deservedly, for there can be no doubt about the vital contribution the Convention and its operation make to the goals of international peace and security. Soon after, the value of the Convention as an instrument of security was fully tested in a highly visible and closely monitored mission in Syria.

This assignment came at a time when some misgivings about the future of the Organisation were being expressed. These were put to rest with OPCW's performance in the face of the most difficult and challenging of circumstances. The Organisation has proved itself capable of taking on and fulfilling difficult mandates. There is only the necessity for States Parties to ensure that the OPCW remains fully resourced and that it retains the political space to continue to perform in an objective and impartial manner.

In the beginning there were some doubts about the capacity of the Organisation to undertake the work in Syria. This was not necessarily a negative attitude. It only reflects the fact that in comparative terms the OPCW does more with less. Even so the sceptics were proven wrong. The credit for the success of the demilitarisation mission in Syria is evenly shared between those directly connected to the work and the States Parties who came forward with financial and material support.

The manner in which the Syria demilitarisation mission was conducted under extremely compressed time-lines, the work of the Fact Finding Mission as well as that of the Declaration Assessment Team – all combine to prove the resilience of the Convention in addressing real life problems. These missions also establish the Organisation as capable, dynamic and adaptable. When we look to the future, these are the attributes that are essential for the OPCW to continue to serve contemporary security interests and to meet future challenges.

These challenges require for the Organisation to have a well-defined and substantive role in dealing

with chemical terrorism. The decision adopted recently by the Executive Council entitled, 'Addressing the Threat Posed by the Use of Chemical Weapons by Non-State Actors' constitutes a major step in establishing the parameters for the Organisation to make its contribution in preventing and responding to the threat posed by the use of chemical weapons by non-State actors.

At a time when global challenges require coordinated global responses, the Organisation looks to greater collaboration between relevant international bodies. There is much that needs to be done in this area. Let me illustrate this point through a couple of specific examples.

We have a long standing Relationship Agreement with the United Nations. This provides the broad framework of cooperation between the two organisations. However, it does not in itself provide for the practical modalities of such cooperation, for example, in investigating alleged use of chemical weapons. At our initiative a related supplementary arrangement was concluded in 2012 with the UN which proved timely. It sets out the modalities and procedures for a possible investigation of alleged use under the Secretary General's mechanism in which OPCW experts and resources are placed at his disposal. We were, therefore, fully prepared when the Secretary General initiated his investigations into the chemical weapons attacks in Syria in 2013.

Those incidents set in motion a dynamic that led to Syria's acceptance of the CWC and the elimination of its chemical weapons programme. This is one example of how anticipation, cooperation and collaboration can prepare us all to better deal with contingencies when they occur.

Another example is the implementation of United Nations Resolution 1540 that covers the issue of non-state actors and weapons of mass destruction capabilities. The OPCW has over the years acquired valuable experience in promoting the national implementation of the Convention. This experience can prove to be most beneficial to the United Nations in its own endeavours to promote the implementation of UNSCR 1540.

There remain untapped synergies which the policy making organs of various international organisations can usefully identify. This should be followed by the pooling of expertise and resources for addressing common threats and issues. I do not consider the differences in the respective mandates and memberships of different organisations as insurmountable hurdles. Institutional interests cannot be regarded so sacrosanct as to compromise the common interests of the international community. These too must adapt according to the dictates of time and the necessity of change.

We have developed good cooperation within the framework of the UN Counter Terrorism Implementation Task Force and this can be further enhanced through regular interaction.

National customs authorities have a vital role in ensuring that global trade does not allow contraband to cross borders. This includes interdicting chemicals of concern. Last year we signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the World Customs Organisation that expands our cooperation in order to tighten national and international controls on the trade of toxic chemicals. We expect to conclude another MoU with the World Health Organisation which has been involved in some of the investigation work we did recently. These are positive steps in our own endeavour to reach out to other international organisations to enhance cooperation and coordination.

A key aspect of the successful experience of the OPCW is that it retains its true multilateral character. International cooperation has played a vital role in preserving a unity of purpose within the diversity of our membership that includes a broad range of countries whose economies are developing or in transition.

Disarmament and non-proliferation are the two pillars of the Convention that serve the core security

interests of our entire membership. But the Convention is not just about that and the OPCW is today a firm structure because it also stands on two other pillars, namely, international cooperation, and, assistance and protection against chemical weapons.

There was a time when a fragmented view of the Convention separated its security objectives from its international cooperation provisions. Time has proven this to be a somewhat artificial division.

Today in an age of heightened concerns about terrorism, it is international cooperation that allows countries to better identify the threats, to share information and to establish the legal and enforcement mechanisms for action. This is a transnational threat. Every country making itself safe from terrorism contributes to the security of its neighbours and beyond.

Our international cooperation activities have also engendered a sense of ownership across our membership. Programmes in this area have strengthened steadily and continue to remain a source of maintaining the goodwill and consensus so necessary for progress. Thousands of beneficiaries of OPCW capacity building programmes remain loyal and strong supporters of the Convention. Their commitment while serving in their own countries creates a support base for the Convention across the globe.

Our Africa programme is particularly noteworthy as it responds to not only the developmental priorities in the continent but also supports our national implementation goals.

This is also true for programmes in the area of assistance and protection where additionally, in case of a chemical weapons attack, States Parties can also call upon the OPCW's newly established Rapid Response Assistance Mission (RRAM) capabilities.

With the experience gained, the steps taken, the initiatives underway and the challenges identified, we have in place all the ingredients that will keep the OPCW effective, dynamic and future oriented. There cannot however be any grounds for self-contentment or complacency.

The objective of preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons is multifaceted and of permanent value. It requires investment of financial, technical and diplomatic resources.

The Organisation's budget has for the last several years remained static on the basis of zero-nominal budget growth. Due to a decrease in demilitarisation activities, the Secretariat was able to reallocate resources to other areas. We however might need to revisit this approach as ambitions for sustaining the effectiveness of the Organisation will be affected without the availability of adequate resources. We also rely on voluntary contributions for many of our activities. The financial support of the European Union in particular has been of crucial importance for which we are grateful.

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 with a shift of focus from destroying chemical weapons to preventing their re-emergence. The tenure policy needs to be reviewed as it is becoming increasingly difficult to recruit and to retain staff, especially, in specific technical areas. The competitiveness in the industry and compensations offered to highly skilled individuals make it an unattractive proposition for them to leave their steady career paths for an Organisation that will retain them only for a brief period of time.

And finally a word about the political necessity of maintaining the culture of consensus that has served the Organisation so well. Differences of opinion in a multilateral body are nothing new. However when they relate to such a crucial issue as the use of chemical weapons, it gives cause for concern.

The prohibition on use is fundamental to the norms of the Convention. It tolerates no compromises. The Convention and through it our collective long term security is better served by promoting respect for the rules and not allowing any exceptions, explicit or implicit. It is also crucial that when chemical weapons are used, investigations proceed unhindered and the perpetrators are held to account.

On its part the Secretariat and its staff are pledged to perform their duties honestly, impartially and objectively. This is a guarantee for a truly efficient, dependable and reliable international organisation that serves the interests of all nations.

Thank you
