

OPCW Day 2016 – Chemical Safety and Security in a Technologically Evolving World

Opening Remarks by Director-General Ahmet Üzümcü

The Hague, 2 May 2016

Ambassador Ibarrola-Nicolín, Chairperson of the Conference of the States Parties,
Ms Jones-Bos, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands,
Mr Mayor van Aartsen of The Hague,
Dr Foradori, Vice-Minister of Foreign Relations and Worship of Argentina,
Dr Zerbo, Executive Secretary of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization,
Prof Gibson,
Prof Karplus,
Excellencies,
Distinguished participants,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to open the conference on *Chemical Safety and Security in a Technologically Evolving World* – the centrepiece of our celebration of this first OPCW Day.

Nineteen years ago – on the twenty-ninth of April 1997 – the Chemical Weapons Convention became a legally binding obligation to make the world safer.

The same moment marked the birth of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, or OPCW.

Its task has been to oversee implementation of what has proven to be the world's most effective disarmament treaty.

That OPCW Day 2016 has attracted such broad-ranging participation is testimony to the strength of our collective endeavour to rid the world of chemical weapons.

An endeavour that has so far seen 92% of the world's declared chemical weapons eliminated.

And an endeavour that continues to respond in new ways to a rapidly changing threat environment.

I extend a warm welcome to you all, and a special welcome to our speakers and honourable guests.

I am delighted that the Secretary-General of the United Nations, H.E. Mr Ban Ki-Moon, has prepared a message for us, so shortly after honouring us with a visit to the OPCW.

I also wish to acknowledge the many young people here – including school students from Dresden.

They will demonstrate highly creative work they have undertaken to raise awareness of chemical weapons.

Their presence, alongside that of experts across diverse fields, reflects a central message underlying discussions we will have over the next three days.

We must learn from the present, as we draw inspiration from the past, to map out the future.

For, now more than at any other time in our existence, one thing is clear: future challenges will be very different from those of the past.

Going forward, we will be called on to do more than just destroy chemical weapons.

We must prevent such weapons from ever again re-emerging in any form.

To do this, we need to think imaginatively, and act responsibly, in making sure chemical materials are stored, handled, transported and traded across the globe in the safest and most secure way possible.

That is the challenge set by this conference.

Rapid advances in science and production technologies, alongside increasing globalisation of chemical industry, are bringing more benefits to more people in more places.

The quality of our lives is being enriched by new chemical applications in human health, in agriculture, and in consumer production.

Yet, while innovation drives progress, it also places more responsibility on us to ensure chemistry is used exclusively for peaceful purposes.

This is a responsibility that is at the very core of the OPCW's mandate.

Which is why the OPCW's partners – in industry, in the scientific community, in government agencies, and in civil society – are so vital.

In partnership, we can make new, much-needed contributions to enhancing chemical safety and security.

For the challenges ahead are truly daunting.

The security landscape is shifting dangerously.

Non-state actors are not only seeking to acquire or make chemical weapons, but also to use them.

Tragically, this has come to pass in the Middle East, where chlorine and sulfur mustard have been, and continue to be, used as weapons.

In this environment, the accessibility of many of the materials required for making chemical weapons requires heightened vigilance, as does the vulnerability of toxic industrial chemicals when improperly stored or transported.

At the same time, many of the challenges facing us also present opportunities – opportunities that I hope we can explore together here and in our ongoing collaboration.

For example, more can be done to harness the benefits that scientific and technological progress can have for how the OPCW undertakes its monitoring and inspection activities.

We must also develop best-practice safety and security standards, and work to provide the means for implementing them.

And we within the OPCW – the Technical Secretariat and States Parties, alike – must energise our partnerships to expand our reach – into industry and the scientific community, into academia and civil society.

Fundamentally, our mission here at the OPCW has not changed from the day of its inception.

But, in the face of new security realities, its complexity has increased, and our results have become far more difficult to measure.

OPCW Day 2016 could be no more timely or relevant in purpose.

It provides a valuable forum for exchanging ideas and exploring innovative pathways across the very diverse range of expertise represented here.

Themes for panel discussions range from the challenges of globalisation to new threats, from emerging technologies to capability requirements, from regulatory issues to future directions in industry.

At the same time, your discussions will be supplemented in a hands-on, practical way with interactive workshops and visits to the OPCW Laboratory and Equipment Store.

Our common objective is a simple and vital one: to ensure that the regime for safeguarding implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention remains responsive and robust.

For this reason, OPCW Day 2016 is more than a conference – it is an interactive event also aimed at raising awareness of the objectives of the Convention and the work of the OPCW and its partners.

Several companies will exhibit their CBRNe-related research, products and capabilities. I welcome this as a good example of public and private partnerships in countering new threats.

And our designated laboratories will feature innovative applications aimed at strengthening the network's analytical capacity.

You will also have noticed posters displayed throughout the conference space.

I hope they will stimulate your imaginations about the long road we have travelled, as well as the road – or, rather, many roads – still ahead.

With that, allow me, once gain, to welcome you to OPCW Headquarters, and to wish you fruitful and productive discussions.

I hope that they form the basis of future collaborations that will help us meet new and emerging challenges with imagination and vigour.

Thank you.