



ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

“Re-Arming Our Humanity: Contributions of Disarmament to Peace”

Lecture by Director-General Ahmet Üzümcü

Nobel Peace Prize Laureates Lecture

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REMARKS AS DELIVERED

Bishop Dr Rentzing,

Deputy Minister President Dulig,

Excellencies,

Dear Students,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I feel deeply honoured to speak to you today in this extraordinary building. It stands as a reminder of the tragedy of war but also as a monument to the human resolve for peace and reconciliation.

The title of this talk, “Re-arming our Humanity: Contributions of Disarmament to Peace,” is a theme that concerns people of goodwill everywhere.

Our civilization has to its credit many achievements. Science and technology have brought countless benefits, improved the quality of life and lifted millions of people across the world out of poverty.

Yet, many of these same achievements have also created new possibilities for destroying ourselves and our world.

War, by its nature, is cruel. The tools of destruction that are available today magnify the perils of warfare. What we normally describe as weapons of mass destruction are weapons whose effects cannot be confined to the battlefield. Their threat is at once inhumane and indiscriminate.

It is for this reason that nations continue to strive to bring about conditions that would either limit or eliminate the most dangerous weapons ever created.

It is important to remember this: We did not reach the heights of our modern civilization by technology alone. We were only able to do so because of our commitment to shared norms and values such as equality, justice and human dignity for all.

One key lesson of recent history is that progress in law and ethics must keep pace with advancements in science and technology. Our survival depends on upholding universal values as opposed to purely national interests. This is the essence of the multilateralism that covers many diverse endeavours, including disarmament. We live in a world that is inter-connected and inter-dependent. The challenges of our globalised world can be effectively met only through collective efforts.

The right of human beings to live in peace and security is fundamental. The threat of mass destruction negates this right. Disarmament seeks to re-establish this right as a moral imperative.

The elimination of chemical weapons should provide hope and encouragement to international efforts relating to weapons of mass destruction. Chemical weapons are today totally banned under the Chemical Weapons Convention. And, multilateral cooperation, manifest in the work of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, ensures that the treaty functions effectively and to the benefit of each of its Members.

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Last April, I was at another historic building reconstructed from the ruins of war – the medieval Cloth Hall in the Belgian town of Ieper.

A ceremony was held there to mark the passing of one hundred years since the first large-scale use of chemical weapons. It was a solemn event, honouring the memory of countless victims of chemical warfare in World War I and other conflicts across the globe.

But it was also an auspicious occasion on which we took stock of our remarkable endeavour to rid the world of this terrible scourge.

Today, 91% of the world's declared chemical weapons have been destroyed under international verification. This amounts to more than 64,000 tonnes of the deadliest poisons ever produced.

As a result of these efforts, an entire class of weapons of mass destruction is now at the threshold of being completely eradicated. It is for this very tangible achievement that the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2013.

The terrible suffering of those who became victims of chemical warfare cannot be forgotten. The best way to honour their memory is through our determination to prevent such tragedies from occurring in the future. We have shown how this determination can stand as an example of what we can achieve when we work together, which is in line with the OPCW motto, "Working together for a world free of chemical weapons".

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Let me briefly describe to you the history and achievements of chemical disarmament.

As the Holy Roman Empire, Germany was party to the very first attempt to remove poison from the battlefield after signing the Strasbourg Agreement with France in 1675. Other attempts were later made by the 1874 Brussels Convention and the 1899 Hague Convention. But the limited provisions of The Hague Convention failed to prevent widespread use of chemical weapons in World War I, prompting efforts to develop a more binding instrument. This came in the form of the 1925 Geneva Protocol.

Very soon thereafter, reservations submitted by several signatory states compounded major shortcomings in the Protocol. These relate to the fact that it only prohibited the use, but not the possession of chemical weapons, and lacked a mechanism for enforcement. This absence was tragically felt as chemical weapons were used later in several conflicts throughout the world.

It was not until the late 1960s that the international community was finally able to agree on advancing a more comprehensive ban on chemical and biological weapons. The Biological Weapons Convention was concluded in 1972, but it took another twenty years for negotiators to agree on the text of the Chemical Weapons Convention and on the terms of its verification regime. The widespread use of chemical weapons during the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s propelled negotiations towards a global ban. Only four years after the horrific attack against civilians in Halabja, in Iraq, the Convention was concluded in 1992.

As a result, a comprehensive ban not only against the use of chemical weapons, but also against their possession, development, production, stockpiling and transfer was achieved. What is more, the Convention's negotiators built in a stringent international verification regime and laid the foundations for an independent international agency to monitor compliance – the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, or OPCW.

Since the Convention's entry into force in 1997, the facts speak for themselves.

Our membership has grown rapidly to a nearly universal figure of 192 countries. As I already mentioned, 91% of declared chemical weapons have so far been destroyed, with remaining stockpiles – in Russia and the United States – due to be eliminated within the next seven years. Five other countries that had declared possession of chemical weapons stockpiles have already completed destruction, verified by OPCW inspectors. This includes the elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme. Iraq will soon destroy the remnants of chemical weapons inherited from the previous regime.

And to ensure that chemical industry across the globe is engaged in exclusively peaceful activities, the OPCW has conducted inspections at more than 3,000 facilities in over eighty countries – and continues to do so. We also work with our Member States to monitor transfers of potentially dangerous dual-use chemicals, to help ensure transparency about their use.

Finally, the OPCW and its Member States conduct training and assistance activities to ensure full and effective implementation of the Convention across the globe, with a special focus on where needs are greatest. These activities range widely – from assistance and protection against chemical attacks or incidents, to promoting cooperation in analytical chemistry, laboratory management and other technical spheres.

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The link between disarmament and peace has been firmly established by the international community. The United Nations Security Council has declared that proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and their means of delivery, constitutes a threat to international peace and security.

Over the course of nearly two decades, the work of the OPCW has progressed steadily towards the total elimination of an entire class of weapons of mass destruction.

In this time we have had to deal with some extraordinary challenges.

When the OPCW embarked on the mission to eliminate Syria's chemical weapons programme in September 2013, many said it could not be done. Certainly, the technical, logistical and security obstacles were enormous.

But less than a year later, some 1,300 tonnes of chemical weapons had been accounted for, removed from Syrian territory, and largely destroyed. This was achieved on the strength of an unprecedented collective effort involving the United Nations and more than thirty countries including Germany.

Yet, as successful as this mission was, many questions have been raised as to what impact it has had on the conflict, as well as more broadly on global peace and security.

The first of these is that the conflict continues to rage. More than 250,000 people are estimated to have perished over almost five years of fighting – many of them since the last chemical weapons were removed from Syria more than eighteen months ago.

What is more, chemical weapons have continued to be used in Syria. The OPCW has substantiated allegations that toxic industrial chemicals have been used as weapons in several incidents, including one where sulphur mustard was used.

In what terms, then, can we speak of any peace and security benefits from the mission to eliminate Syria's chemical weapons?

You will all recall the tense international environment in the second half of 2013. An investigation into allegations of the use of chemical weapons in the Damascus suburb of Ghouta in August had confirmed that the deadly nerve agent sarin had been used, killing hundreds of civilians.

The world had then seemed on the brink of being involved in another armed conflict in the Middle East only to be brought back as a result of an agreement between the Russian Federation and the United States of America. Signed in Geneva on 14 September 2013, this agreement provided for the elimination of Syria's chemical weapons programme, which was then taken up by the OPCW-UN joint mission.

While this mission was never conceived as a solution for ending the civil war in Syria, it dramatically reduced the tensions which could have led to a major international conflict in the region, and perhaps, beyond.

It must also be remembered that if all those dangerous weapons and production capabilities had remained intact, the conflict in Syria could have turned into an even more appalling humanitarian crisis. With several terrorist groups seeking to acquire such weapons, people in Syria and the world are better off with those capabilities having been destroyed.

Let me also add that a key advantage of all disarmament treaties is the sense of security that they promote on a regional basis. Syria's accession to the CWC can only be welcomed in a region long mired in conflict.

While Syria's chemical demilitarization reflects a new security reality, it has not yet, unfortunately, led Israel or Egypt to join the Chemical Weapons Convention. But the fact that others have recently joined – notably, Myanmar and Angola – provides impetus for reconsideration, as well as intensifying efforts to achieve a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East.

The diplomacy that has driven the Syrian mission has also helped to propel fresh efforts to resolve the conflict by political means.

Worth recalling is that Syria's chemical demilitarisation was, after two and a half years of fighting, the only aspect of the conflict which the international community could agree on. And the momentum it generated went well beyond the narrow scope of this mission. A continuing dialogue amongst the key players helped to initiate the Geneva II process at the beginning of 2014. While this process was ill-fated, it has had an after-life. The UN Security Council recently adopted resolution 2254, which calls for a ceasefire and outlines a process for a political settlement.

It can be argued that consultations regarding chemical disarmament in Syria continued to offer opportunities for broadening the consensus in the UN Security Council. For it was in the disarmament mission that international cooperation on Syria, involving both Russia and the United States, first came into play. Similarly, in the ongoing efforts to identify those responsible for chemical attacks in Syria, this cooperation has been sustained.

This leads me to my final observation concerning the peace and security benefits of the OPCW's engagement in Syria.

There can be no suggestion of 'mission over' for as long as chemical attacks continue in that country and their perpetrators go unpunished. What rallied the international community to take action in this regard was the OPCW's confirmation, through its Fact-Finding Mission, that toxic chemicals had been used systematically as weapons in Syria.

Based on a resolution adopted by the UN Security Council, an OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism is now working to identify the authors of these attacks. The results of its work will play a crucial role not only for securing the gains of Syria's chemical disarmament. They will also serve to deter new chemical attacks and ensure accountability in the eventual efforts to obtain peace and reconciliation in Syria.

What all this shows is that consensus in one endeavour can be extended to take in broader peace-related endeavours, however great the obstacles. It also shows that disarmament need not only

be the outcome of peace, as some would argue, but can in fact be a driver for peace in ways that are not immediately apparent.

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The legacy of chemical disarmament clearly proves that disarmament is not merely the regulation or elimination of weapons. It is a process which is often difficult and challenging. But its benefits are broad in scope, extending to the diplomatic and political fields. The process helps to sustain dialogue and cooperation and strengthens multilateralism.

More than twenty years since it was concluded, the Chemical Weapons Convention remains the only multilateral disarmament treaty that bans an entire class of weapons of mass destruction, and at the same time regulates this ban through international verification. Two of its provisions stand out, in particular.

First, unlike the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Chemical Weapons Convention – or CWC – does not discriminate between haves and have-nots. No member state is entitled to possess or develop chemical weapons, much less to use them. Those eight countries that have declared possession of such weapons are obliged to get rid of them, as they now have, or are in the final stages of doing so. The Convention is therefore a ban on chemical weapons without any exceptions.

Secondly, while the Biological Weapons Convention, like the CWC, prohibits an entire class of weapons of mass destruction, it has no means of verifying compliance. Only the CWC has a verification regime that holds its members to account – and not only through the regular industry inspections I mentioned earlier. It also has a challenge inspection mechanism, by which any member can call for investigation of another member on the basis of well-founded concerns over compliance.

These fundamental provisions speak to another unique feature of the Convention – namely, the result-focused way in which it was negotiated, and how this has shaped its implementation.

Making sure that the treaty's comprehensive provisions could be implemented required input not only from diplomats, but also industry representatives and scientists.

Scientists had to draw up definitions, as well as provide advice on analytical and verification activities. And industry had to be satisfied that its commercially sensitive information could be protected in the course of inspections. Without their involvement, the Convention would not have been as effective as it has been.

But, more than this, the ongoing engagement of these stakeholders has allowed us to transform habits of compliance into a culture of proactive collaboration.

We can see this in the work of the OPCW Scientific Advisory Board, which keeps us up to date on how advances in science and technology can challenge implementation of the CWC, as well as enhance it.

We can see this in our consultation with industry – to streamline its reporting obligations and develop ways of improving them.

We can see this in our engagement of non-government groups, academia and civil society – to source new ideas and to help them expand our disarmament community through awareness-raising activities.

And, above all, we can see this in the interaction between Member States. The practice of consensus is firmly ingrained at the OPCW. There is no formal requirement for decisions to be taken by consensus. But it demonstrates the wisdom of making progress by seeking to take everyone along thus strengthening the universal commitment to chemical disarmament.

This combination of prohibition and verification, on the one hand, and engagement and outreach, on the other, will, in my view, be the key determinant of the OPCW's ongoing success.

As we approach our long cherished goal of the elimination of existing chemical weapons, our future success will be measured not only by weapons destroyed, but also by weapons not rebuilt. The latter is a complex undertaking, whose outcomes will be far less visible and therefore harder to attract political support for.

What makes the task of preventing proliferation of chemical weapons so difficult is, the inherently dual-use nature of what goes into making them. This means that many of the materials and production technologies we monitor have beneficial applications in medicine, in agriculture and in consumer goods production. But they can likewise be misused to manufacture chemical weapons, such as nerve agent and sulphur mustard.

What is more, there are many widely traded industrial chemicals, which are not monitored by the CWC regime, but can be used as chemical weapons. Chlorine, for example – the same chemical that purifies municipal water supplies and sanitises hospital and kitchen floors – can choke and kill when dispersed as a concentrated gas. We have recently seen this happen in Syria, as we did a century ago in Ieper.

It is for this reason that the CWC does not limit its definition of a chemical weapon to purpose-built chemical weapons. It encompasses any toxic chemical whenever it is used to harm or to kill.

How, then, can we confidently protect against weapons that will remain relatively accessible, even after we have destroyed stockpiles of manufactured chemical weapons?

One thing from the experience of the OPCW is abundantly clear: the hard power disarmament of prohibitions and verification remains vitally important, especially in preventing terrorists from acquiring chemical weapons – but it will not be sufficient alone.

Consider this: some 15,000 potential new chemicals are added to the chemical abstracts database every day. With our scientific knowledge expanding at this rate, we cannot hope to oversee every new chemical or production technology – nor should we try to. Rather, monitoring and inspection activities must be increasingly supplemented by a soft power disarmament based on engagement and outreach.

What this means is that we need to collaborate with scientists and industry, not seek to control them. We need to nurture a culture of responsible science in our research institutions, in our

universities, and in our schools. And we need to encourage our scientists to develop a world view and ethical framework that supports the aims of the CWC.

In recognition of this, the OPCW has made education and outreach a core activity for underwriting our longer-term success in preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons.

Let me briefly highlight two of the initiatives we have developed.

The first is the establishment of an Advisory Board on Education and Outreach. Drawing on expertise from around the world, Board members will guide our development of new activities, materials and e-learning tools to increase awareness of the dangers posed by misuse of dual-use technology. They will also help us to expand our reach into universities and schools, through more interactive formats, to inculcate habits of science in the service of peace.

The second initiative has been the OPCW's facilitation of a German-led proposal on developing a code of ethics for practitioners of the chemical sciences. Bringing together industry representatives and scientists from some two dozen countries, we were able to lay out professional ground rules for preventing the misuse of science – what participants named as The Hague Ethical Guidelines. Their value as a vocational guide draws directly on the authority of its authors – an international community of engaged chemistry practitioners.

There is, therefore, nothing 'soft' about the impact of soft power disarmament based on engagement and outreach. It is a vital extension of the disarmament mission at a time when governments no longer hold the sole prerogative for security, and when any effort to broaden the community of stakeholders for peace and disarmament must be welcome.

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This leads us to a final question: why have we not been able to replicate in other areas the success of the Chemical Weapons Convention over the two decades since it was negotiated.

It is true that traditional multilateral disarmament appears to have stalled. The last treaty to be concluded at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva was the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty in 1996 – some twenty years ago.

But the international community has nonetheless notched up several successes in significantly reducing numbers of nuclear weapons and enhancing non-proliferation measures, especially in containing the number of new nuclear-armed states. We have also devised and implemented new approaches that have been responsive to emerging threats, such as UN Security Council Resolution 1540 and the Nuclear Security Summit process. Both of these are aimed at preventing non-state actors from gaining access to materials and technology related to weapons of mass destruction.

This recalibration has partly been in response to a pressing new reality. While states are generally constrained by legal norms, and the threat of their using weapons of mass destruction is now remote, the only constraints on terrorist groups are procurement opportunities. Limiting such opportunities in respect of weapon-sensitive materials and technologies must be accorded a high priority.

In light of this, perhaps the more relevant question to ask is what sort of success do we need in order to secure against new and emerging threats to peace? For, as I have sought to show here, disarmament must be a comprehensive, holistic process that seeks to make its gains permanent by anticipating and addressing future threats.

The broader challenge before us is to rethink our security amid a still evolving present, characterised by growing economic interdependence and the rise of new transnational threats ranging from terrorism to climate change.

We would do well to heed the advice of Friedrich Schiller in this respect, “Live with your century, but do not be its creature (Lebe mit deinem Jahrhundert, aber sei nicht sein Geschöpf)”.

In the case of chemical disarmament, our past success in destroying stockpiles of chemical weapons will be different from our future success in preventing the re-emergence of such weapons. If the Chemical Weapons Convention is to be held up as a model for disarmament in other areas, it is this flexibility and responsiveness to changing circumstances – alongside the political will driving it – that I hope will be most persuasive.

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Just like the concepts of justice or equality, the notion of peace is driven by ideals.

And yet we should remember that ideals and appeals to our humanity are not, of themselves, enough. We must base such appeals on comprehensive and enforceable rules. Only then will we be able to give full flight to what Abraham Lincoln called the “better angels of our nature.”

The way we have been able to do so in the field of chemical disarmament has been by transforming habits of compliance into a culture of collaboration – by going beyond what must be done, to what ought to be done.

Given the reality of what weapons of mass destruction can bring about, disarmament will remain an indispensable founding stone for building peace. It is hard work often full of frustration. But we must not give up.

Built brick by brick, disarmament can support a large and elaborate edifice to peace. This message sounds particularly resonant at the Frauenkirche which has seen the ravages of war over the centuries but has prevailed as a symbol of the human urge for peace through perseverance.

The search for peace is the most important part of our humanity. I hope that the role of disarmament I have outlined here shows clearly at least one thing – that true disarmament is nothing less than a re-armament of our humanity.

Thank you for your attention.