



## **Chemical Weapons: New Threats and Ongoing Challenges**

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### *REMARKS AS DELIVERED*

Your excellency Mr Prime Minister,  
Your excellency Mr Defence Minister,  
Honourable Congressmen,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to address the Seoul Defence Dialogue 2016. Since being established only four years ago, the Seoul Defense Dialogue has become a premier forum for discussing emerging security challenges.

Nowhere are these challenges more keenly felt than in East Asia. And nowhere in the world does anyone question the global importance of this region for addressing these challenges. For what happens here matters for all of us.

East Asia is now driving the world economy. People in this region are reaping the benefits of extraordinary growth, underpinned by structural reforms and region-wide arrangements for economic cooperation. This is having an enormously positive impact on international trade and investment flows.

Yet, despite its enviable economic outlook, East Asia continues to face a host of daunting security challenges. Some of these are global in scope, such as cyber security and terrorism. Others are particular to the region, albeit with global implications, including territorial disputes and the threat posed by North Korea's weapons of mass destruction.

Observers suggest that the absence of regional security architecture heightens these threats. They contend that, without common understanding centered on a rules-based system, there is increased risk of miscalculation and conflict.

I will leave commentary on this to others more expert in the region's dynamics than myself. But what I will say, from our own experience, is that rules-based norms can help mitigate security risks and threats.

A clear case in point is what we have been able to achieve in ridding the world of an entire category of weapons of mass destruction – namely, chemical weapons.

I should acknowledge here the important contribution of our host to the work of the OPCW. The Republic of Korea has made a significant contribution to global chemical disarmament, across the board – as an active member of the OPCW Executive Council, a generous donor for our operational and training activities, and host of two OPCW-designated laboratories

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Let me start by sketching the progress we have made since the Chemical Weapons Convention entered into force two decades ago.

The Convention now has 192 Member States, and its implementation has so far seen 93% of all declared chemical weapons destroyed. This amounts to more than 65,000 metric tonnes.

Most of the eight States Parties declaring possession of chemical weapons have now eliminated their stockpiles. The two major possessor States – Russia and the United States – are scheduled to complete destruction of their remaining stocks by the end of 2020 and 2023.

These achievements have been made possible by what has been described as the most successful disarmament treaty in history.

The unique strength of our Convention is that it combines a comprehensive legal norm with a robust verification regime. In other words, the Convention not only bans chemical weapons under international law – without any exception – but it also gives us the means to prove that this is being done. It requires the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, or OPCW, to monitor destruction and to conduct inspections of industrial facilities of interest.

Over the years, this regime has built an unshakeable foundation of trust between states that their mutually held obligations are being met in comprehensive, transparent and equitable way. It also won the OPCW the Nobel Peace Prize in 2013 for the tangible disarmament results that our work has delivered.

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The Convention has withstood many trials over the past nineteen years. But none has been more arduous than the unprecedented mission to remove and eliminate Syria's chemical weapons. Its success was born of a remarkable international effort pooling technical, financial and political support.

The baseline for this success was, at all times, the Chemical Weapons Convention and the international community's determination to enforce it. This landmark treaty provided a ready-made regime that obviated any need for a special ad-hoc mandate for acting on a rare opportunity to eliminate a major chemical arsenal. More than this,

it acted as a rallying point for consensus in extending the application of the Convention to better capture its spirit.

This was reflected in our Member States' willingness to agree to the removal of weapon stocks for destruction outside of Syrian territory – a decision that was endorsed by the UN Security Council. Consensus guided every aspect of what was a complex mission involving many interlocking parts and no small risks. These ranged from packaging chemicals, to transporting them safely to port, from trans-loading them, to overseeing their safe destruction at sea and at land-based facilities under OPCW verification.

The upshot of all this was that the Syria mission significantly reinforced the Chemical Weapons Convention by extending, and consolidating, the rules governing its implementation. In particular, it enhanced what already was an effective multilateral mechanism by making it even more responsive to contingencies.

The clearest evidence of this is how the OPCW has addressed ongoing allegations of use of chemical weapons in Syria. In April 2014, I established a Fact-Finding Mission, which confirmed the use of chlorine as a weapon in northern Syria and, more recently, attacks involving the use of sulfur mustard. Importantly, the work of this mission provided the impetus for the Security Council to establish the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism. Its purpose was to identify the perpetrators of these and other chemical weapon attacks in Syria – and hopefully, to bring them to justice.

The OPCW FFM continues to enquire about the most recent allegations of use of chemical weapons in Syria and we shall report their findings to our States Parties. The continued reports of use are most disturbing. We also continue to engage Syrian authorities to resolve outstanding issues related to the declaration they submitted to the OPCW – issues that have caused many of our Member States to question whether Syria is fully compliant with its obligations.

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Does this all mean, then, that we can claim mission accomplished for global chemical disarmament? Regrettably, the answer to this question must be no.

There remains both new and unfinished business to attend to, for which our experience in Syria has in many ways been emblematic.

The first is the spectre of chemical terrorism.

At a time when the likelihood of states using chemical weapons has become distant, non-state actors – in Syria and Iraq – have not only sought to acquire such weapons, but have also used them. What this means is that chemical terrorism is no longer a theoretical proposition or even imminent threat, but a stark reality. It is also a reality that could affect many more of us across the globe over coming years as foreign fighters return to their homelands with experiences gained in Syria and Iraq.

The lesson from Syria is that we must expect the unexpected.

No-one could have predicted Syria's accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention, based on its behavior prior to the events that precipitated it. We can only hope that the same proves to be the case with North Korea. North Korea is one of only four countries – alongside Egypt, Israel and South Sudan – that have not yet joined the Convention. And the DPRK is suspected of harbouring a chemical weapons stockpile and production capability.

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So, what can be done about these twin challenges?

The OPCW has sought to address the threat of chemical terrorism through various proposals advanced in an open-ended working group on this subject. What has emerged from this group's discussions is that the Chemical Weapons Convention already has comprehensive provisions for criminalising all activities that it bans. These relate not only to the use of chemical weapons, but also to their development, production, stockpiling and transfer.

What also needs to be remembered is that prohibitions under the Convention apply to all natural and legal persons – whether or not they act in the name of a state or non-state entity. Based on this, gaps in capturing activities by terrorists do not reflect gaps in the Convention, but rather, in its implementation at the national level.

Our challenge, then, is to ensure the full and effective implementation of the Convention by establishing the Convention's prohibitions in the domestic law of all 192 of our Member States. We are doing this through training, information-sharing and capacity-building activities designed to promote best practices in legal processes and enforcement– especially where they are needed most.

At the same time, we are working to bring on board the four states still outside the Convention. Of these, Pyongyang has so far not responded to any of our overtures on chemical disarmament.

I welcome the efforts by the international community in regards to North Korea's WMD capabilities. If successful they would no doubt enhance peace and security on the Korean Peninsula. While I understand that these efforts primarily focus on nuclear capabilities they must also oblige North Korea to join the Chemical Weapons Convention without further delay.

Chemical weapons are not a strategic option for anyone, and no State should be permitted to have an ambiguous or undefined stance towards them. I use the opportunity today to strongly urge North Korea to accede to the global norm that is the Chemical Weapons Convention.

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Looking ahead, our future success in addressing non-proliferation challenges will depend on further enhancements to rules-based norms. These, in turn, will need to be

responsive to shifting strategic circumstances – including those associated with the forces of globalisation.

This especially applies to the work of OPCW, as we gradually shift our focus away from destroying existing chemical weapons to preventing new ones from being built. An overarching principle guiding our activities to this end will be to look beyond traditional disarmament and non-proliferation objectives to encompass a more holistic approach to chemical security.

East Asia will have a prominent role to play in this respect for a variety of reasons. The region is rapidly becoming a major production base for chemical materials and technologies and the regions long held status as a premier hub for global trade is set only to increase into the future. More and more scientists and engineers in the region are at the cutting edge of technological developments and industrial applications. These inevitably include dual-use technologies.

In these circumstances, it is vital that we have in place effective legal provisions for monitoring and acting on proliferation-related activity, as well as the tools for enforcing them. As long as any state or non-state actor harbours ambitions to obtain weapons of mass destruction, we simply cannot afford to be complacent about the risks.

I therefore welcome that the SDD 2016 address important security issues of relevance to the region and the wider world.

Thank you.