



ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

**The Chemical Weapons Convention 1997-2017:
Progress, Challenges and Reinforcing the Global Norm against Chemical Weapons**

Keynote Speech by Director-General Ahmet Üzümcü

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REMARKS AS DELIVERED

Excellencies,
Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me at the outset to express my deep appreciation to the U.S. government for organising this event to mark the 20th anniversary of CWC's operation and the work of the OPCW.

The support of the United States for OPCW has been critical to its standing today as a model international organisation. This support has been manifest in all the features captured in the title of this forum.

In addressing audiences around the world, I often recall the historical and conceptual underpinnings of the Convention. The purpose is to provide context to our work for a fuller appreciation of this unique project. This is an audience that needs no such introduction. Yet, recollection of what is worthy is an important device for strengthening the resolve for its preservation and profitable continuity. At junctures such as this, it is indeed worthwhile to recall the precious value of the legal instrument we call the CWC and the truly lofty goal that it serves.

The important strides we have taken in building on the design of the Convention and towards realising its vision did not occur spontaneously. It is the result of work by a community of people from different walks of life and occupations pooling in their skills and devoting their energies to what they believe is good for them and good for the world.

As we commemorate 20 years of the CWC, we are reminded of the exceptional nature of this endeavour; a singular, internationally organised effort of global reach for the permanent abolition of an

entire class of weapons of mass destruction. An object and purpose that is guided not merely by cold calculations of security but by a moral compass. Unitary excellence and collective compassion are in this scheme an enduring basis for improving the human condition.

True progress can only be achieved when our advancement as a global civilisation draws upon the unchanging canons of universal ethics and morality.

These values underpin the Convention and provide the real motivation to men and women, governments, and industry, as well as civil society, to make it a success.

And that success indeed is the highlight of these two decades.

Anniversaries hold meaning because of the occasion they provide to rejoice and to reflect.

There is much for States Parties to the CWC to celebrate. The United States has every reason to be proud of having contributed substantially to where we stand today.

As a major possessor State, the United States has remained strongly committed to its obligations to destroy its chemical weapons. Despite the challenges encountered in the process on account of domestic legal and environmental issues, it has stayed the course. As at 31 April, the United States had destroyed over 90% of its declared Category 1 chemical weapons. Destruction is expected to be completed, as planned, by 2023.

The Russian Federation has similarly adhered to its commitments and remains on track to completing the destruction of its declared stockpile with 98% of its weapons already destroyed by the end of April this year. Destruction at the Kizner facility in Russia is expected to complete its work next year.

These two were of course the known chemical weapons programmes and shaped the way the CWC was negotiated. But we must not forget that the Convention led to the declaration of a number of other chemical weapons programmes – all of which were eliminated under OPCW verification – an unexpected boon to the objectives of security and non-proliferation.

The twenty years of implementation of the Convention by the OPCW testify to the fact that the Convention works and works well. Built initially from scratch, the verification regime is now firmly established to serve current needs and adaptable to future requirements. The Convention and our work are meant to, and have indeed contributed to enhancing security. And this function of the regime will remain its enduring purpose. Its membership has expanded rapidly. Today 192 countries are States Parties.

The skepticism about the future of the OPCW has been belied by the manner in which it has dealt with recent challenges, especially, in Syria.

The narrative covering our experience with the OPCW-UN Joint Mission in Syria for the elimination of its chemical weapons program needs no repetition. The key lesson of the undertakings in Syria is about the ability of the Organisation to fulfill mandates given to it in the most extraordinary and challenging circumstances.

I am aware of the initial doubts about the capacity of the Organisation to undertake the work in Syria due to its relative size and resource base. These were proven unfounded as everyone connected to this mission put in extra effort often going beyond the call of duty.

The CWC and OPCW were central to the endeavor with all the crucial planning stages including the plan for removal and destruction having been assigned to the OPCW. States Parties, some 30 of them and the European Union, contributed with funds and materials. The United Nations provided logistical and security support. I wish to acknowledge the significant role played by Ms Sigrid Kaag, who is with us today, as the special coordinator of the Joint Mission.

While the most visible part of the US contribution was the unprecedented destruction operations at sea, the quantum of US assistance was much higher.

Subsequent developments, however, brought additional challenges for the Organisation. The removal and destruction operation, crucial in its own right, proved to be but one element of the larger problem associated with chemical weapons in Syria.

A particularly unfortunate and disturbing situation is the unceasing reports of continuing use of chemical weapons.

Investigations of alleged use of chemical weapons constitute a key part of the Convention. Yet in Syria we were confronted with a circumstance all its own. In the wake of allegations of use of chlorine in Syria that escalated by March and April of 2014 and appeared of increasing credence, I established a Fact-Finding Mission that was announced on 29 April 2014.

Since that time, nineteen separate missions have looked into various incidents that were reported to involve the use of toxic chemicals as weapons.

Repetition has a tendency to make the extraordinary appear commonplace. In fact, there is nothing routine about the FFM.

In May 2014 the FFM came under armed attack on its way to Kafr Zita, some 250 kilometers from the relative safety of Damascus. Some of its members were momentarily detained by an armed group until the intervention of the main Syrian opposition group which had helped plan this visit. It is fortunate that there were no casualties.

The FFM proceeded to complete its work in the next couple of months conducting its enquiries from a safe location outside of Syria. Its reports became the basis for two UN Security Council resolutions, 2209 and 2235.

These are the circumstances under which a team of volunteers performs what it considers as duties in the service of the international community and to protect the norms that it has declared to be sacrosanct. In establishing the Fact Finding Mission, we were aware of both the security and the political risks. The security risks turned out to be true when the team was attacked. Apprehensions of its political risks have also turned out not to have been misplaced either.

There is unfortunately no uniformity in the reception to the findings of the FFM, nor those of the JIM. This cannot bode well for the international system or for the morale of those who take great risks to perform their assignments with dedication and professionalism.

The CWC provides for investigations of alleged use of chemical weapons. On-site investigations involving technical and forensic procedures are foreseen in the concept of such investigations under the

Convention.

The security environment in Syria virtually rules out on-site investigations. Under these conditions, the choice before us is between inaction or to conduct enquiries applying procedures and methods suited to the conditions of conflict zones.

Clearly, the first option would mean resignation. Inaction feeds impunity and would cause irreparable damage to the Convention and its objectives. Given the particular circumstances and dynamics in Syria, the OPCW had to adapt while continuing to rely on the internationally recognized methods of fact finding investigations.

The FFM therefore collects evidence through interviews of victims, the treating professionals, first responders and eye witnesses. It gathers other relevant information, and secures environmental and biomedical samples which are analysed by the OPCW designated laboratories.

Some of these enquiries have concluded with a high degree of confidence, that chlorine and, sulphur mustard have been used as weapons in Syria. The investigation into the widely reported incident at Khan Shaykhun is underway. In liaison with the United Nations, a possible visit to the alleged site of the incident at Khan Shaykhun is under consideration. Given the sensitivity of the mission and past experience, this visit is dependent on the availability of the most stringent security assurances for the FFM. Meanwhile, the FFM is conducting a complete analysis of the information and data at its disposal, including the results of sample analyses and mapping of the location of victims.

On 19 April, I informed the Executive Council that the bio-medical samples collected from victims were analysed at OPCW designated laboratories and results indicated exposure to Sarin or a Sarin-like substance.

The international community has forcefully condemned any use of chemical weapons by anyone under any circumstances. Both the Executive Council and the UN Security Council have, by consensus, recognised the facts about the use of chemical weapons in Syria.

Between the FFM and the JIM, the international community has two carefully designed mechanisms that draw their legitimacy from the decisions of duly constituted and authoritative policy bodies of the OPCW and the United Nations.

This is work of historic importance in our collective quest to uphold fundamental norms and values as an enlightened and humane civilisation and to bring to book those who choose to violate them.

We face yet another challenge in Syria. And this relates to clarifying certain elements of Syria's declaration of its chemical weapons programme. The Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) continues to seek clarifications on several outstanding issues in order to reach a point where Syria's declaration will be regarded by States Parties as fulfilling the conditions of completeness and accuracy.

This matter can be brought to closure with scientifically and technically plausible explanations on the unresolved questions.

I have urged the Syrian Arab Republic to declare all relevant parts of the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Centre (SSRC). We will continue to address the gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies in regard to the Syrian declaration.

The Executive Council decided in November 2016 to conduct additional inspections in Syria. According to this decision, the Barzah and Jamrayah SSRC facilities are to be inspected twice a year and, when security conditions permit, the relevant sites identified in the third and fourth reports of the JIM. The first inspection was completed at both the Barzah and Jamrayah facilities in March 2017. In coordination with the United Nations, we continue to monitor the security situation with a view to organising inspections at sites identified by the JIM as involved in the weaponisation, storage, delivery, and use of toxic chemicals as weapons.

While there are critical outstanding issues in Syria, it is clear that the Organisation's role and engagement remains crucial to their resolution. This has been a role crafted with ingenuity and commitment to the aims of the Convention.

The Convention has proved to be resilient in addressing real life problems of gravity and import. The Organisation for its part has emerged as dynamic and adaptable. The recent past illustrates not only the kinds of unexpected challenges that can emerge but also that the Organisation has what it takes to meet these challenges head on.

The OPCW is and will be what its States Parties want it to be.

Preparations for the future need to be approached consciously and deliberately.

The work in Syria reconfirms the critical value of the CWC and of a strong OPCW. This strength will be sustained with an investment into its future – an investment that needs to begin now.

With all that has been accomplished the question before us is; where do we go from here? And why is this question even relevant?

It is relevant because the destruction of the last of the declared chemical weapons will mark a new era for the Organisation. It is natural to ask: what is the purpose of a body when its most resource consuming function is fulfilled?

The CWC constitutes a permanent prohibition against chemical weapons. Once the declared chemical weapons have been destroyed, we will need to continue to work to prevent their re-emergence. In an age of continuing advances in science and technology as well as new security challenges, we will need to work on multiple fronts. Preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons and deterring any use will not be a single track undertaking. It will be significantly more complex.

In 2010, when I took over this position, it was obvious that the Organisation faced existential questions about its future and its relevance not only in the post-destruction phase but even in the shorter term as destruction related activity was declining substantially.

As the bulk of our resources were devoted to verification of destruction, this meant that a significant part of our operational capacity would turn redundant. A straight forward calculation would seem to justify simple downsizing to cater to the reduction of the workload. And with the impact of the global financial crisis at the time, this to some seemed an attractive proposition.

For an international organization with a unique mission to serve normative goals in perpetuity, such action is however more akin to an amputation rather than down-sizing.

One must guard against losing knowledge, experience and expertise that is hard to find outside the crucible of the Organisation. We also needed to bear in mind that while the disarmament part of the mission was nearing sunset, the non-proliferation part was becoming increasingly more important. Adequate capacity was necessary to cater to the possibilities of certain States not Party joining the Convention and declaring chemical weapons programmes; as indeed happened in the case of Syria.

In order to address such issues of far-reaching importance, I established an Advisory Panel on Future Priorities of the OPCW. The recommendations of the Advisory Panel submitted in July 2011 remain relevant. They have triggered a debate which is now on-going in the open ended Working Group on Future Priorities.

We know that around the world, the chemical industry makes a major contribution to economic growth. Aware of its responsibilities by virtue of the sometimes dangerous materials that it produces, transports or otherwise handles, the industry has to its credit developed several programmes for self-regulation. It is also subjected to high standards of national audits.

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

The verification regime of the Convention has served its purpose well. The policy making organs have not had to rule on any questions about non-compliance. On its part, the Secretariat has maintained its readiness to conduct challenge inspections though there has not been an instance of resort to this tool of significant deterrence value.

Maintaining this confidence building feature of the Convention gives rise to two fundamental requirements. One relates to the ability of the Organisation to detect new chemicals and establish if they are relevant to the Convention. For example it is important to acquire a deeper understanding of the growing interaction or convergence between chemistry and biology and the emerging ability to produce potentially dangerous chemicals through new techniques and methods.

And second, we need to strengthen our relationships with key partners in science, academia and industry.

On the side of science, the OPCW Scientific Advisory Board, comprising eminent experts from 25 different States Parties, helps to keep us abreast of these developments.

The United States is ably represented on the Board by Ambassador Robert Mikulak – an individual with an outstanding record of contribution to the CWC and the OPCW.

The Board's recent work has been invaluable in offering advice on monitoring progress on science, evaluating its impact for the Convention and how the Secretariat can prepare itself for future verification tasks.

Progress in science also offers opportunities for improving verification and protection measures with the attendant imperative of promoting ethical practices through awareness raising and education.

On the side of ethics and education the OPCW has established an Advisory Board on Education and Outreach. The Board seeks to guide the development of new activities, and teaching tools to increase

awareness of the dangers posed by the possible misuse of dual-use technology.

They also help us to disseminate our message to universities and schools in order to nurture a culture of responsible science. The goal is to develop and promote professional ethics that support the aims of the CWC.

The effective use of new scientific methods and procedures also promises the ability to detect the presence of chemical warfare agents through improved sample collection and analysis.

Sampling and analysis for example have been crucial in our recent missions to determine the validity of allegations of use of chemical weapons.

The nature and circumstances of the various incidents looked into by the FFM have varied. Depending on these, in some cases sampling and analysis has been necessary.

Samples taken in support of these investigations are transported to the OPCW Laboratory, where each sample is split into multiple aliquots. Identical sets of samples are then sent to two partner labs for analysis. If there is conflict between the results of analyses, another set of samples is sent to a third laboratory.

In looking at various aspects of enhancing the Organisation's role in the face of new challenges, two areas stand out as requiring attention.

Recent contingency operations involving investigations into the possible use of chemical weapons have involved collection and evaluation of a variety of information and evidence. These activities while carried out with utmost diligence can in the future benefit from additional analytical tools.

I have therefore established within the framework of the OPCW Scientific Advisory Board a Temporary Working Group on Investigative Science and Technology. This Group will review methods and technologies used in investigative work and how these can usefully augment the Secretariat's capabilities.

Secondly, I strongly believe in reinforcing the OPCW's Laboratory's functions and capacity. The role of the OPCW Laboratory has been critical in our recent work.

When an incident occurs, the requirement for the Organisation to coordinate an effective response depends on the quick identification of the chemicals involved. Lessons learnt from recent missions in Syria strongly underscore the need for the capability of the OPCW Laboratory to be enhanced. This will also enable it to more effectively lead the network of partner laboratories which are called upon to conduct analysis as designated OPCW laboratories.

I have recently commissioned an initiative seeking to upgrade the OPCW Chemical Laboratory to a Center for Chemistry and Technology. The objective is to strengthen OPCW's Science and Technology capabilities to fully address the threat of chemical weapons. The OPCW Laboratory is under this initiative envisaged to be expanded and bolstered with additional capabilities benefiting from recent advances in S&T. The success of this initiative would depend on extra-budgetary financial support.

Here it would be pertinent to also mention the role played by the OPCW Laboratory in creating the network of bio-medical laboratories which has been crucial to our investigative work in Syria.

The spectre of chemical terrorism continues to loom and demands more effective multilateral coordination as well as improving national implementation of the Convention globally.

On the legal front, ensuring that all our States Parties establish effective legal and other regulatory and the necessary domestic structures to administer them is critical. The existence of laws and the ability to enforce them is essential in preventing non-state actors from gaining access to materials and equipment that could be used for the production of chemical weapons.

Although more needs to be done, the domestic implementation of the CWC has continually improved. Over the years we have created and improved upon programmes that assist our States Parties in this regard.

I believe another step that can be of substantial benefit is for States Parties to not confine themselves to the familiar template of national implementation but to continue to review the new threats and possible additional legislative and administrative measures for prevention. This of course will vary for each country and those desirous of seeking the assistance of the OPCW should feel assured of our full cooperation.

In this context, the OPCW's Open-ended Working Group on Terrorism offers an important forum for a more in-depth exploration of the ways and means for a strengthened OPCW role in counter-terrorism and for sharing best practices. Moreover, the Secretariat has established a Rapid Response Assistance Mission (RRAM) to assist, upon their request, States Parties which may come under chemical terrorist attack.

I am also of the view that there is untapped scope for greater collaboration between international organisations on a broader platform including in the field of counter-terrorism. Collaboration often occurs on an Ad Hoc basis, as happened in the case of the Joint Mission in Syria. We need to find avenues for making such partnerships more institutionalised and therefore more reliable.

I believe that the policy making organs of various international organisations should devote attention to identifying the several areas of mutually beneficial cooperation. A pooling of expertise and resources and the utilisation of synergies can greatly benefit us all given the ultimate unity of our goals and objectives that outweighs any political sensitivities or differences of membership.

For example, UN Security Council resolution 1540 (2004) represents an important instrument for denying weapons of mass destruction capabilities to non-state actors. At its heart lies the same notion of effective national legal frameworks and enforcement ability. The OPCW, with its institutional capacity, experience and implementation support record, is uniquely placed to advance the objectives of that resolution.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Treaties acquire a life of their own through experience and practice.

The OPCW has carved for itself an important position in the international security framework. It has taken unwavering commitment, courage and hard work to attain the standing that the Organisation now enjoys.

States Parties have provided the necessary governance environment in which the Organisation was able to work to its true potential. The need of the hour is to preserve the spirit of cooperation and to remain focused on the norm and the Organisation that serves the norm.

We need to institutionalise the lessons learnt from our recent undertakings such as in Syria and Libya. Both were served on account of the close engagement between the States Parties and especially the key players.

We also need to inject a sense of urgency in the debate about future priorities. Prevention of re-emergence is a multi-faceted concept. To the extent of my authority, I have endeavoured to elevate the discussions through tasking the Scientific Advisory Board and the Secretariat, and through broadening our engagement. It is up to States Parties to bring energy and focus to this discussion about the future of the Organisation.

It is understandable that different States Parties and groups of members approach their commitments through different angles. Yet, what they all agree on is that non-proliferation and deterring the use of chemical weapons remains a crucial objective. And the goal is better served in the spirit in which the Organisation conducts its cooperation activities as well as collaboration between our members.

Over the last twenty-years, the CWC and the OPCW have made a major contribution to the international goals of peace and security.

Regimes such as the CWC are not built overnight. Time, resources and an extraordinary cooperative spirit have built up an institution that serves a vital purpose and offers a wealth of accumulated knowledge and experience.

We must work together to not only preserve this enterprise but to strengthen it further to meet the challenges of an uncertain future.

I am confident that on its part the United States will continue with its tradition of strong support for the Organisation.

I thank you for your attention.
