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**OPENING STATEMENT BY THE DIRECTOR–GENERAL TO THE CONFERENCE OF
THE STATES PARTIES AT ITS FOURTH SPECIAL SESSION**

Mr Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,

I welcome you back, Mr Chairman, at the helm to preside over the Fourth Special Session of the Conference of the States Parties. Please be assured of the Technical Secretariat's full support in your work.

This Conference has been convened to address a single agenda item, namely, to uphold the global ban against chemical weapons use. The special session takes place against a background of serious concerns regarding the use of chemical weapons that has repeatedly occurred since 2013. This is an unacceptable situation. International public opinion is increasingly restive, alarmed at the failure of the relevant world fora to hold those responsible accountable for their actions.

In our endeavours to uphold the global ban against chemical weapons use, we are not walking into a blind alley. It is a path well-travelled.

Let us take a moment to remind ourselves of the great strides this Organisation has taken towards the attainment of the goals of the Chemical Weapons Convention—and of our proximity to establishing a world free of chemical weapons.

There is worldwide recognition that the Convention occupies a position of distinction amongst similar endeavours—a singular regime in the field of weapons of mass destruction that has created a comprehensive prohibition against chemical weapons made effective by concrete steps, including verification.

While viewed initially as mainly a product of the peace dividend at the end of the Cold War, the Convention has proven to be far more beneficial in its impact. It is a legal framework of truly global reach and is critical to international security and non-proliferation objectives.

The steady implementation of the Convention for over two decades, and the progress in realising key priorities and adaptability in responding to unforeseen situations, have been the hallmarks of our collective endeavours at the OPCW.

The elimination of over 96% of all declared chemical weapons is an achievement that has no precedent. The world is just a few steps away from reaching a momentous milestone—the first occasion on which an entire category of weapons of mass destruction will be eliminated under independent international verification.



In the context of disarmament as a means of promoting international peace and security, there is no better example of effective multilateralism.

In the course of the last two decades, the Organisation has consistently risen to the challenges it has faced.

When a need was felt to rapidly increase membership in the Organisation in order to universalise the Convention, the Executive Council adopted, in 2003, an action plan on promoting the universality of the Convention. As a result, the Chemical Weapons Convention has become the disarmament treaty with the highest rate of growth in its membership.

When there arose a general concern about national implementation, the Conference adopted an Action Plan on Implementation of Article VII Obligations. While this remains work in progress, the results have been encouraging and national implementation has steadily improved over the years.

One can also recall the delicate issue of meeting the destruction deadlines when States Parties opted for a constructive course of action.

The two major possessors, the Russian Federation and the United States of America, were allowed, through a Conference decision in 2011, to continue their destruction campaigns beyond the lapsed deadlines. On their part, the two agreed to demonstrate, in a tangible and transparent manner, the steps that they would take towards completely eliminating their declared stockpiles within a reasonable period of time.

Our international cooperation programmes continue to help an ever-widening group of stakeholders around the globe. Their goodwill is as valuable to the Organisation as their improved skills are to their own countries.

Over the last few years, we have also moved decisively in the direction of re-ordering the priorities for the OPCW to ensure that it remains an effective entity against the re-emergence of chemical weapons in the post-destruction phase.

The role of the OPCW in dealing with international terrorism has acquired the significance that it deserves. The issue is now on the agenda of each regular session of the Executive Council. Earlier this month, we organised the first Conference on Countering Chemical Terrorism, which received overwhelmingly positive feedback.

A Rapid Response and Assistance Mission (RRAM) has been established for providing a quick response in the case of a chemical weapons attack, where a State Party might be unable to cope with the situation on its own. This mechanism will be activated upon the request of the State Party concerned.

We have established an Advisory Board on Education and Outreach. Furthermore, we have elevated discussions in the Scientific Advisory Board and broadened the scope of its work to bring about concrete benefits in the implementation of the Convention. The upgrade of our Laboratory will yield additional dividends for our technical capabilities and training activities.

These important steps demonstrate how the Organisation has crafted responses to challenges that were not foreseen in earlier years.

All of our progress can be credited to the culture of cooperation and goodwill that has been a hallmark of the unique OPCW experience. It was this spirit that enabled the Organisation to take up one of its greatest challenges: our mission in Syria, where we were mandated with an operation to remove and eliminate chemical weapons in the midst of a conflict. The coordinated support of States Parties, the United Nations, and the European Union, as well as the dedication and commitment of OPCW staff, has made it possible for the Organisation to deliver and to prove the sceptics wrong.

In April 2014, the Secretariat undertook a process of consultations with the Syrian authorities in order to resolve the gaps, inconsistencies, and ambiguities in its declaration. The Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) has conducted 19 visits to Syria and held numerous discussions with Syrian officials both in The Hague and Damascus. Provision by Syria of technically and scientifically plausible explanations to a number of questions remains the key to bringing this matter to a satisfactory conclusion. The information made available so far has not been sufficient for the Secretariat to confirm that the Syrian Arab Republic has submitted a declaration that can be considered accurate and complete.

The work of the DAT and of the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) did not originate in a political vacuum. These tasks had the full endorsement of States Parties.

More than once the FFM has come under a critical spotlight. The FFM was established in the first place because the reports of use were serious enough to warrant action.

We have in place standard procedures for investigations of alleged use of chemical weapons. These were developed in accordance with the Verification Annex of the Convention. The methods and procedures used by the FFM to gather information, data, and evidence have always been consistent with those standard operating procedures. We had to adapt them taking into account the security situation in the country. The network of OPCW designated laboratories has been extensively used.

The kind of work carried out by the FFM could hardly have been envisaged a few years ago. Yet, this group of highly dedicated, skilled and trained professionals has voluntarily undertaken missions at great risk to their personal safety. Within the constraints of our resources, as well as the availability of the necessary skills set, the FFM teams have represented the geographical diversity of our membership.

The use of chemical weapons has been condemned by all States Parties. United Nations Security Council resolutions constitute strong affirmations condemning any use of chemical weapons and reflecting the will of the international community to hold accountable those who bear responsibility. The OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism, established by United Nations Security Council resolution 2235 (2015), was mandated to identify the perpetrators of chemical weapons attacks and subsequently submitted its reports to the Security Council.

The Convention regime requires the active engagement and ownership of all States Parties. Its success depends on full and effective implementation, as well as the vigilance of the policy-making organs. At the same time, it is crucial to adhere to the differentiated responsibilities of the various organs of the Organisation. The Secretariat works under the general guidance of the policy-making organs. But it must continue to be afforded the environment in which to fulfil its responsibilities diligently and impartially.

I have not hesitated in pointing out that currently there is no mechanism that would ensure that those who use chemical weapons are held fully accountable. Investigations of alleged use of chemical weapons are essential if we are to preserve the core norms of the Convention, its credibility, and its integrity.

Chemical weapons use, wherever it occurs, is a serious offence requiring resolute action. If accountability is avoided, the potential re-emergence and acceptance of chemicals as weapons of war and terror will not be deterred.

We have spent more than 20 years diligently strengthening the norm against chemical weapons. The Convention has been a success because all States Parties have worked to make it so. All have a stake in its continuing health. This is a norm that affords protection to all of us.

Today, when we are confronted with a difficult issue, let us return to the culture of cooperation and accommodation that has always driven our endeavours. This spirit of goodwill has allowed accommodation of divergent views for the sake of realising defined goals. A number of difficult issues have in the past been handled within the framework of the Convention and in the best traditions of multilateralism—by giving up on maximalist positions, through constructive debate and discussion, and by never giving up on the search for compromise for the common good.

Today it is necessary to restore respect for our collective interests. We can thus transform our challenges into new opportunities.

Our Organisation is poised for a new era of service to the international community. The road map for the future shows a well illuminated path. Far from becoming irrelevant, the Convention and the OPCW are ready to continue to guarantee security in their field to all States Parties well into the future. This is the moment we must all seize.

Restoring political cooperation and paying attention to the necessity of the needed financial resources for the Organisation will continue to ensure a strong and effective OPCW that is a prerequisite for international peace and security.

I urge the Conference to forge unity. I appeal to you that any decisions that you adopt should reflect the moral and ethical principles we are all sworn to respect and to uphold.

I am confident that the Conference will conduct its deliberations seriously and constructively, reflecting the traditions of cooperation and collaboration of our Organisation. I am equally confident that, should the Conference decide to assign any additional responsibilities, the Secretariat will, as always, do its best to shoulder them in the characteristic professional and objective manner that it has consistently demonstrated.

I thank you for your attention and wish you a productive meeting.

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