



ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

Peace and Disarmament: The Bedrock of Growth and Prosperity

Peking University

Beijing, China

Keynote Speech by Director-General Ahmet Üzümcü

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REMARKS AS DELIVERED

Prof. Fu, Vice Dean,

Faculty members,

Dear students,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to once again visit China. Your country's active support for the work of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, or OPCW, testifies to its steadfast commitment to the global ban on chemical weapons.

China's standing in the international community and its position as a Permanent Member of the UN Security Council confer on the country its special responsibilities for the maintenance of international peace and security.

I am honoured at the opportunity to be at the Peking University and to address you.

This prestigious academic institution is recognized among the very best in China and, indeed, the world – and for good reason.

Many of China's most eminent thinkers, scientists and leaders are Peking University alumni. As such, this institution has shaped their thinking, their actions, and China's future.

You as current students, represent the generation whose values, ideals and hard work will lay the foundations for tomorrow.

Your country's emergence as a driver of the global economy speaks to the diligence and dynamism of the Chinese people. The future holds much promise for China and for the world.

China's One Belt One Road initiative is an excellent example of how your country is seeking to create new communications networks around the world to boost economic prosperity through strengthened international cooperation. Such initiatives may also promote the peaceful use of scientific and technological advances including chemistry.

As potential leaders of tomorrow, you live at a time in your country's great history when anything seems possible. China's emergence as a global powerhouse has sparked a renewed interest in re-discovering its past. Therein lies not the history of a country but of a civilization. Civilizations are not built by brick and mortar. They are nurtured over centuries through wisdom and foresight. Today, people all over the world are inspired by the teachings of the great Chinese philosophers and sages. They taught the art of living a good life of inner peace and social harmony.

In our contemporary world which we often call the global village, social harmony is inseparable from global peace. Prosperity and progress in the world requires peace as a fundamental, irreducible condition.

Without peace, true progress of any kind is impossible. When peace is imperilled, economic and social developments as well as advances in business, science and technology are all at risk. For peace – above all else – is the foundation of our well-being, and of our prosperity.

Today we live in a world of unparalleled progress. Science and technology, coupled with effective governance, have brought countless benefits and improved the quality of life for millions of people around the world. In China alone, in the last three decades, 500 million citizens have been lifted out of poverty.

In the tradition of Chinese thinking, we must always see every phenomenon in the perspective of not just the present but also the future; not only its evident benefits, but also its potentially hidden dangers.

Science has given humankind immense power to build. But we know that power that is not mediated by norms can also destroy.

Science and technology have created the most unprecedented opportunities for progress. It has also given rise to the deadliest weapons imaginable. Those we describe as weapons of mass destruction are the most merciless. Their effects are not confined to the battlefield. They kill and maim not just the soldier, but ordinary men, women, and children.

It is for this reason the international community continues to strive to eliminate these weapons. Today's world is inter-connected and inter-dependent. Its challenges can be effectively met only through collective efforts.

The advances we have made were not achieved by technology alone. They were made possible by a collective commitment to shared norms and values such as equality, justice and human dignity for all.

Our survival depends on defining and upholding values that we as the international community have agreed are of universal appeal and application. This is the essence of multilateralism that covers many diverse endeavours, including disarmament.

Disarmament, especially, as it concerns weapons of mass destruction has long been on the international agenda. It was the subject of the very first resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in January 1946; reflecting the aspirations of the UN's founding nations.

Since that time, there have been a series of international agreements and treaties that seek to deal with the threats posed by weapons of mass destruction. None, however, is as far reaching and as stringent in its application as the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC).

The Convention is recognised as a major disarmament treaty. But it really evolved in response to a deeply felt humanitarian imperative; the unquestionable need to eliminate a barbaric and reviled tool of warfare.

The legacy of chemical warfare has caused devastation that has been felt around the world and across generations.

Over one hundred years have passed since the first large-scale use of chemical weapons amid the trenches of World War I.

By the war's end, nearly one million soldiers would bear the scars of chemical weapons, and 100,000 would lose their lives gasping for air.

Here in China, these weapons have left a legacy that continues to be felt today.

Even though chemical weapons were recognised from the outset as inhumane and indiscriminate, they would continue to be used regularly after World War I – often in conflicts hidden from the world's view.

With the effects chemical warfare still apparent, the conclusion of the CWC and its entry into force in 1997 marked a watershed. The international community's long-standing efforts to comprehensively ban chemical weapons had finally become a reality.

This year, we mark the twentieth anniversary of the Convention and founding of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

The Convention is the first multilateral treaty that bans an entire class of weapons of mass destruction. It establishes rights and obligations of far-reaching scope. The Convention is comprehensive. It prohibits the development, production, stockpiling, transfer, retention and use of chemical weapons by States Parties, under conditions of strict international verification.

The Convention makes no exceptions in prohibiting the possession of chemical weapons. All States Parties have equal rights and obligations, and those who possess chemical weapons must destroy their stockpiles. States Parties are also required to ensure that, within their jurisdiction, chemistry is only used for peaceful purposes.

This important landmark is an opportunity to reflect on the Organisation's progress made towards its original goals, and to prepare for what the future might hold.

Much has been accomplished in these twenty years. One-hundred-and-ninety-two nations are now signatories to the Convention, and 98% of world's population live under its protection.

When the Convention came into force, the first priority was to eliminate the world's stockpiles of chemical weapons. This was an unprecedented and ambitious endeavour. Never before in the history of disarmament did the world agree to remove an entire class of weapons from its military arsenals.

Since that time, over 95% of some 72 000 tons of declared chemical warfare agents have been destroyed under verification by the OPCW. This work has made a tangible and lasting contribution to global peace and security in recognition of which the Nobel Committee awarded the peace prize to the OPCW in 2013.

We are on track to fully complete this task. The two largest possessor States, namely Russia and the United States, are both progressing steadily towards eliminating their stockpiles. This is expected to be completed by the year 2023.

China, as I mentioned earlier, has long endured the dangers of chemical weapons abandoned on its territory by Japan before 1945.

In recent years, much has been done to address this legacy through cooperative ventures by the Chinese and Japanese Governments, supported by the OPCW.

To date, over 56,000 items related to abandoned chemical weapons have been declared at over 90 locations throughout China.

Of this total, the OPCW has to date verified the destruction of over 45,000 items.

The safe destruction of these weapons is critical to removing risks to China's people and environment.

For its part, the OPCW verifies destruction operations through on-site inspections, the use of monitoring equipment and review of relevant documentation. Yesterday, I had the opportunity to visit the Haerbaling destruction facility together with a delegation of 15 Ambassadors from The Hague. We witnessed the impressive destruction operations first-hand.

All parties involved are committed to maintaining the momentum in the destruction of these abandoned chemical weapons. The priority continues to be completing this task in a safe, timely and effective manner. In March this year, Japan and China submitted a plan to the OPCW outlining a road-map for continuing destruction.

During the twenty years of its existence, the Organisation, representing the will of the States Parties and through their mutual cooperation, has made many significant strides in fulfilling its mandate.

Every country in the world except only four subscribe to the Convention. An effective and reliable verification regime serves as a crucial confidence-building measure. Our international cooperation programmes continue to promote a sense of participation and ownership amongst our States Parties whose economies are growing. Assistance and protection against chemical weapons is a crucial right enjoyed by States Parties. Our programmes in this area continue to strengthen. National implementation of the Convention is showing encouraging progress.

When faced with challenges, the Organisation has given a good account of itself. This has been most evident in our work in Syria. In August of 2013, the world witnessed the killing of 1400 innocent civilians in Ghouta - a densely populated suburb of Damascus.

They were victims of a deadly attack with the nerve agent sarin. It is a crime to use chemical weapons; and an atrocity to use it against civilians.

The incident created global outrage and a crisis which brought us to the edge of international conflict. A wider war whose outcome was difficult to predict was averted, as Syria joined the Convention after an agreement between the Russian Federation and the United States that was signed in Geneva in September 2013.

This marked a high point in the cooperation between these two major powers in dealing with the conflict in Syria. On 27 September that year, the OPCW Executive Council adopted a decision on the elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme.

The mission that followed to remove Syria's chemical weapons was unprecedented. It required us to operate in uncertain and risky conditions in an active war zone within a very ambitious time-frame.

Although clearly challenging, the mission underscores that with political will and cooperation, the Organisation and the international community are capable of dealing with extra-ordinary situations.

With the support of more than 30 States Parties, including China, 1300 metric tonnes of chemical weapons material was removed from Syria and destroyed outside its territory. Before that within a matter of weeks, the capacity to produce chemical weapons had been rendered unusable.

This was an impressive achievement. Unfortunately it did not mark the end of our work in Syria. In the face of persistent and credible allegations that chlorine had been used in Syria as a chemical weapon, I established a Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) in April 2014 to investigate.

Since that time, the Fact-Finding Mission has examined a significant number of incidents and substantiated several cases of the use of chlorine and sulfur mustard.

While the Fact-Finding Mission determines if chemical weapons have been used, the mandate of the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism, JIM, goes one step further. The JIM was established through a UN Security Council Resolution to identify those responsible for the use of chemical weapons which the FFM had established.

In this way, the work of the FFM provides the basis for the JIM to identify the perpetrators with the aim of bringing them to justice.

The most recent use of chemical weapons in Khan Shaykhun in Northern Syria has shocked the world as reports and images emerged of civilian casualties evidently of a toxic substance. The OPCW, through its Fact-Finding Mission, continuing to investigate this incident and will soon submit its findings to the States Parties. What we know so far is that several people were indeed exposed to Sarin or a Sarin-like substance.

As challenging as our work has been, and as steady as we have been in our journey towards a world free of chemical weapons, the tasks ahead are complex and require no less commitment. As we near the goal of completing the destruction of declared chemical weapons, the OPCW and the global community must prepare for an era where preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons will be the main priority.

This is a task that requires investment of financial, technical and diplomatic resources.

While stockpiles of chemical weapons diminish, the threat of chemical terrorism is rising. Although the production and use of chemical weapons by States has become less likely, non-state-actors are now a major concern.

We have already seen that non-state-actors, in particular terrorists, are willing and capable of obtaining and using chemical weapons. It is not difficult to imagine the impact of an attack against a large chemical facility, or the casualties that would result from the release of nerve agent in a crowded city.

To counter these threats, the OPCW is working with its Member States to improve their capacity to protect against such attacks and to mitigate their impact. We are helping States Parties to build capabilities for effective emergency response.

As an active and supportive State Party, China has made consistent and significant contributions in this area. In July this year, China will host the 4th Regional Advanced Assistance and Protection course for Asian States Parties. In September, experts from around the world will gather in China for an international course on medical management of victims of chemical attacks. I wish to express my appreciation for this important Chinese support for our programmes.

An essential component of the framework for prevention is effective domestic legislation and enforcement of the rules of the Convention within domestic jurisdictions. The Convention requires that all States Parties establish and reinforce administrative and legislative measures so that key provisions of the Convention are in force within their jurisdictions. These include the requirement for systematic declarations, industry monitoring, controls on transfers of chemicals, and regulatory measures to identify and track toxic chemicals.

The OPCW Secretariat will continue to invest resources in assisting States Parties to fulfil their national implementation obligations.

China has a fast growing chemical industry which accounts for 10% of gross domestic product. Your country has declared 1354 facilities out of a total of 4,703 industrial plants globally subject to international verification. To date, the OPCW has carried out nearly 500 inspections in China.

These inspections have been carried out without incident – and we continue to count on the Chinese chemical industry as a key stakeholder in the full and effective implementation of the Convention.

Monitoring and inspection activities cannot cover the entire global chemical industry given its scope and scale. To augment these efforts and to strengthen the global norm against chemical weapons we must expand our engagement and outreach. In this way, we raise awareness about the work of the Organisation, and nurture a culture of responsible science in our research institutions, universities, and in our schools.

We have made education and outreach a core part of our activities. For this purpose, an Advisory Board on Education and Outreach has recently been established. This body is guiding the development of new activities, materials and e-learning tools to increase awareness of the dangers posed by the possible misuse of dual-use technology. They will also help us to expand our reach into universities and schools.

The global prohibition on chemical weapons illustrates the vast possibilities of multilateral cooperation for common causes.

In a world that sometimes finds it difficult to reach a common ground on crucial issues, the Convention and the work of the OPCW demonstrate what can be achieved if we remain steadfast in supporting global norms for the common good.

It represents advancement not only in the field of disarmament but also towards humanitarian ideals.

However, we must remain vigilant to protect this norm we have established and must therefore continually strive for a better world. And this can only be achieved through a shared vision and a shared sense of responsibility.

As we mark the twentieth anniversary of the dawn of our mission, it is difficult to predict what the next twenty years will bring. The path ahead is wide open for your generation to tread to ever greater heights. The future of disarmament, peace and security will be shaped by your commitments and your contributions. The task before you is aptly captured by a Chinese proverb; ‘The more you sweat in peacetime, the less you bleed during war’. Peacetime is not a time to rest but to strive in order to make it a permanent human condition.

Let me close by asking you to think imaginatively about how to secure the gains we have made in chemical disarmament. How can we use science and technology to our benefit, and not our detriment? How can we work with scientists and industry to enhance chemical security?

Perhaps most importantly, how can we fortify the multilateral model and agreed upon norms that are needed to continue our success?

As a powerhouse of economic and scientific progress, China will be a critical force in the future in many important ways. I hope that all of you here today will actively play a role.

Thank you.