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STATEMENT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF THE OPCW AT THE FIFTY-FIFTH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY DELIVERED ON 20 OCTOBER 2000

Mr President, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

1. I am pleased to address the United Nations General Assembly on this special occasion, adding my voice as the Director-General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to the hundreds of others which are shaping the global agenda at the dawn of the new millennium. It is a special responsibility which requires me to speak from the heart.

2. I would like to thank the delegation of the Netherlands, the Host Country of the OPCW, for its timely initiative to request the inclusion of the additional item on the agenda of this session of the General Assembly.

3. I am honoured, Mr President, to speak to the United Nations on behalf of the OPCW in your presence, given Finland's unwavering support for the work of the Organisation. I would like, in particular, to acknowledge the active contribution of the former President of Finland, H.E. Mr Martti Ahtisaari, to the quest for the universality of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Mr President,

4. Numerous challenges mentioned in the United Nations Millennium Declaration demand not simply attention, but united, prompt and decisive action on the part of the leaders of all nations - be they large or small. Addressing these challenges also requires wisdom and vision on the part of those who humankind has entrusted with the international coordination of such efforts. Only the dedicated symbiosis of the political will of states with the commitment and dedication of international institutions can bring about the successful resolution of these burning problems.

5. The unprecedented gathering of world leaders in New York last month demonstrated that the age of confusion and doubt about the role and the functions of multilateral mechanisms may be drawing to a close. The turn of the millennium regenerated hope for a new era of togetherness in the international community. The world's rapidly growing interdependence, the increased transparency of national boundaries, the

information revolution, a shared perception of the universality of environmental concerns, and other factors, have combined to produce the reality and the concept of "globalisation". And while the benefits of globalisation must be shared more equally, globalisation itself is also evidence that it is simply no longer possible for some matters to be dealt with by individual states or groups of states. We have entered the millennium of multilateral solutions.

6. One area in which the world has to speak with one voice is international security. The Cold War drew to a close more than a decade ago. Yet it would be unimaginable to proclaim that the threat to world peace is now a thing of the past. In the broad spectrum of other challenges such as global epidemics, regional conflicts, nationalist hatred, religious violence, and terrorism, one of the very real dangers to human survival still emanates from the existence of weapons of mass destruction.

7. In spite of a number of well known setbacks, humankind still can be justifiably proud of its impressive record of achievement in curbing this danger. The total number of nuclear weapons is at its lowest level in twenty years. The Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which imposed real limitations on the proliferation and modernisation of nuclear weapons, has been concluded. Efforts to create an efficient verification regime for the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention are in their final stages, although their end result is still uncertain.

8. Nuclear weapons have traditionally dominated the disarmament agenda. Moreover, the past decade has seen an increased awareness of the dangers of biological warfare. Yet I would submit that, short of an Armageddon scenario, the threat to human life from chemical weapons is still probably the greatest. This is because, in a world which is no longer hostage to superpower confrontation, chemical weapons, compared to nuclear and biological weapons, remain the most "usable" weapon of mass destruction, and can be produced with relative ease, and for a relatively low cost.

9. Nevertheless, I am proud to state that, in the field of chemical disarmament, multilateral efforts have - quietly but effectively - already made a real difference, and are continuing to do so. Now that the OPCW will regularly report to the General Assembly, more will be known about our contribution to the cause of global disarmament and about the positive example which the OPCW provides for other present and future legal instruments and verification regimes.

10. The fact that the Chemical Weapons Convention entered into force on 29 April 1997, and has been successfully implemented for three and a half years, is a remarkable achievement. Never before has humankind embarked on such an ambitious undertaking in the field of disarmament - aiming not just at reductions, restrictions, confidence-building, and non-proliferation, but at the elimination of an entire category of weapons of mass destruction. The creation of the OPCW in the beautiful city of The Hague, a well established and a growing international centre of admirable reputation, and of National Authorities in its Member States to coordinate and monitor the implementation of the Convention - both nationally and internationally - is a unique multilateral disarmament experiment. An experiment which has so far been a complete success.

11. The degree of global trust and confidence in the Chemical Weapons Convention and in the OPCW is best illustrated by the rapid and continuing increase in its membership. The OPCW has grown, from 87 States Parties in April 1997, to 139 States Parties today. On 1 November Yemen will become the 140th State Party following recent similar actions taken by Gabon, Jamaica, and Kiribati during the Millennium Summit. A more than 60 percent increase in membership in three and a half years is without precedent in the history of verifiable disarmament instruments. The trust and confidence which the international community has placed in us must and will be honoured.

12. Historically speaking, three and a half years is a short period. Yet in business terms, it marks the threshold at which a sound undertaking must begin to demonstrate its viability. Patience is undeniably a virtue in international relations. Yet patience should not be confused with inaction. We must be patient in waiting for results. However, we must be impatient when it comes to taking actions.

13. The OPCW has already a lot to show for its three and a half year history because of its forceful and impatient resolve to achieve what it was established to achieve. One half of the 61 chemical weapons production plants declared to the Organisation by 11 States Parties have been either destroyed or converted for peaceful purposes. Seven percent of the world's declared stockpile of 70 thousand tonnes of chemical agents and 15 percent of the 8.4 million chemical munitions covered by the Convention have also been destroyed. All declared chemical weapons have been inventoried, and all declared chemical weapons production facilities have been inactivated. And all are subject to a verification regime of unprecedented stringency. A total of 850 inspections have taken place in 44 States Parties since April 1997, including 300 inspections at civilian chemical plants, to ensure that they engage only in non chemical weapons-related activities. And these inspections are continuing as I speak. Following the submission of the United States industry declaration in the first half of this year, the US chemical industry is now subject to an intensive industry inspection schedule which is proceeding extremely well and has met the full support of chemical manufacturers and of the US National Authority. For an organisation with a little more than 500 staff from 66 countries, including 200 inspectors, which operates on an annual budget of only fifty-five million US dollars - a fraction of the cost of some UN programmes - these are impressive results.

14. At the same time it would be inappropriate to use the rostrum of the General Assembly to talk only of the OPCW's successes. It is also my responsibility as the Director-General of the OPCW to inform you of significant challenges and obstacles to the effective and timely implementation of its mandate.

15. The immediate "raison d'être" of the OPCW is the worldwide elimination of existing stockpiles of chemical weapons and the prevention of their re-emergence, anywhere. This objective will be realised only when all chemical weapons currently in existence have been verified as destroyed, and when all countries have joined the Chemical Weapons Convention.

16. The biggest challenge to the Convention's credibility comes today from the difficulties experienced by the Russian Federation in its attempts to destroy, in accordance with the Convention's timelines, its colossal chemical weapons legacy inherited from the former Soviet Union. A significant delay in the destruction of the world's largest arsenal of chemical weapons may call into question the credibility of the Convention, and could undermine the entire effort to rid the planet of these horrific weapons. Russia has already requested - and received - the approval of the OPCW's Conference of the States Parties for a delay in the destruction of one percent of its chemical weapons, which was originally due to be completed by 29 April 2000. Even though the Russian Federation has already started destroying specialised components for chemical weapons, the actual destruction of chemical agents is scheduled to begin, at the earliest, in the first half of next year. The first - and so far the only - full-scale chemical weapons destruction facility in Russia will be commissioned even later, at the end of 2001.

17. While the magnitude of the problem facing the Russian Federation is truly immense, that reality highlights the need for further urgent and carefully coordinated action on the part of the Russian Government. International assistance, the need for which is beyond doubt, will be provided in sufficient quantity only in the context of an updated action plan yet to be drawn up by Russia itself. There is an urgent need for Russia to take fundamental policy decisions about how it intends to destroy its chemical weapons stockpile at minimum cost, and with adequate measures in place to protect its people and its environment. I was heartened to learn that the Russian Government just a few days ago decided where to locate the seat of its National Authority - the body charged with the national implementation of the Convention. I am sure that the new National Authority - and its dedicated Director-General, Mr Zinoviy Pak, charged with this responsibility by President Putin himself - will immediately take the much needed steps to breathe new life into the Russian chemical weapons destruction programme. I wish him every success and assure him of my full support.

18. I also welcome the steps already taken by a number of countries to assist Russia to destroy its chemical weapons. It is a fact, however, that the offers of such assistance fall far short of the need for them. This highlights another element which has been absent over the past several years, namely, a mechanism for the efficient coordination of international assistance to the Russian Federation. My proposal to establish a "steering committee" which would regularly meet at the OPCW, to monitor the progress of destruction, and to identify gaps in the Russian resources which can only be filled from the outside, has been accepted by Russia, but has yet to be endorsed by donor countries. I am convinced that such a working "steering committee" would help to get things moving. It might also provide the international oversight which would allow the major donor - the United States - to persuade Congress to restore its funding to assist the destruction of chemical weapons in Russia.

19. However, destroying chemical weapons is only part of the solution to the problem which they pose. The Convention will not ultimately prevail until all states have formally committed themselves to it. A total of 34 signatory states still have to ratify the Convention, while an additional 19 countries have yet to accede to it. I keep asking myself the same question - if the reasons for delaying accession are not bureaucratic in

nature, what are they? If these reasons are unrelated to chemical weapons, then we perhaps need to take a fresh look at the whole issue of accession.

20. Of utmost concern is the situation in the Middle East, where Israel, Egypt, Syria, Libya, Lebanon, the United Arab Emirates and, of course, Iraq still remain outside the CWC. This concern is further reinforced by the spiralling cycle of violence which once again threatens the fragile peace process, with dangerous ramifications for regional stability and security - and possibly for stability and security outside that region as well. After all, it was in the Middle East that chemical weapons were most recently used against both combatants and civilians. Heightened tensions in the region are calling into question the strategy which calls for a peace settlement before other elements contributing to such a settlement can even be discussed. What is wrong with taking a series of steps which would help to generate a climate of confidence amongst the key players in that region, and which would demonstrate the genuine willingness of all parties to seek such a comprehensive settlement in parallel with peace negotiations?

21. Perhaps the time has come for all of the above-mentioned countries to review the approaches which they have been pursuing with regard to the Chemical Weapons Convention and to the regional security agenda in general. Would the security situation in the Middle East improve if all actors were confident that the Damocles sword of the possible use of chemical weapons was no longer hanging over their heads? Wouldn't an initiative to join the Convention, together with other steps, create a political momentum in which movement on other elements of the security equation would be forthcoming?

22. The fact that Yemen, Jordan and Sudan have already elected to subscribe to precisely this view indicates that such an approach is not unrealistic in the Middle East environment. Much now depends on the next steps to be taken by other key players. What is needed for the gradual establishment in this region of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction, as proposed by Egypt? Wouldn't accession to the CWC be one of these steps, and a fundamental one at that? I wholeheartedly trust the wisdom of the Egyptian leadership.

23. By virtue of signing the Convention, Israel has already entered into an obligation, inter alia, not to "develop, produce or stockpile" chemical weapons. What, then, is preventing it from ratifying the Convention and codifying its political commitment in legal terms?

24. Equally, much depends on the active contribution of the United States and of other major powers and groups of states which have made the pursuit of a Middle East peace settlement one of the cornerstones of their foreign policy. I, for one, am ready to visit the region at an appropriate time to explore with the leadership the above mentioned security issues.

25. I would also like to express the hope that the leaders of the future Palestinian State will not hesitate to set the record straight from the outset, and will join, not merely the Chemical Weapons Convention, but also other global arms control and disarmament treaties. A public statement of their position in this regard would contribute significantly to progress on this issue.

26. Another region of concern is Africa, where Angola, Somalia and Sao Tome and Principe remain outside the Convention, while Cape Verde, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Comoros, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Madagascar, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Uganda, and Zambia have yet to ratify the treaty. Africa's problems are many. However, Mozambique's decision to accede to the Convention earlier this year proves that these very real problems are not necessarily an impediment to joining the CWC. This is all the more true because the Convention does not confine itself to the issue of chemical weapons, but is also about promoting the peaceful use of chemistry and helping to develop national expertise in pharmaceuticals, pesticides, fertilisers etc.

27. This brings me to a fundamental question. What incentive would a small country have to join the CWC when it has neither chemical weapons nor a mentionable chemical industry? The answers to this question are many. While a country may not have chemical weapons it may, in particular in some regions, be subject to an attack with chemical weapons for as long as such weapons continue to exist. The Convention provides for assistance and protection to its States Parties in the event of such attacks. What is perhaps even more important is that it also calls for States Parties to "not maintain among themselves any restrictions … which would restrict or impede trade and the development and promotion of scientific and technological knowledge in the field of chemistry for industrial, agricultural, research, medical, pharmaceutical, or other peaceful purposes". In addition, the Convention provides for an expanding regime of restrictions in trade in chemicals applied by States Parties towards those states which have chosen to stay out. The chemicals affected by this expanding regime have an increasingly broad range of commercial applications.

28. In the three and a half years of its existence, the CWC has undoubtedly proven its effectiveness as a confidence building measure, and has provided an unprecedented and much needed forum for states parties to address any concerns they may have about the compliance of other states parties. To this end, in addition to the verification activities of the OPCW itself, a number of States Parties have already made use of the various mechanisms under Article IX of the Convention in relation to consultation, cooperation and fact finding. As more states join the CWC, and as their chemical producers support it, the arguments originally advanced for the continuing maintenance of restrictions on chemicals outside a credible, reliable international legal framework become increasingly redundant. Given this fact, the continuing existence of export controls by some states parties against others is hard to understand, and very difficult to justify. I therefore urge those that still retain such controls to reevaluate the need for them in the light of the factors I have just outlined, with a view to removing them as soon as possible. Moreover, restrictions other than those agreed by the international community as a whole could undermine the very legal pillars of any ongoing and future multilateral effort in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation.

29. While the CWC is sometimes perceived only as a disarmament and non-proliferation treaty, it has third and fourth pillars of equal importance. Without them, the Convention would never have come into being. These two pillars are - assistance in the area of protection against the use or threat of use of chemical weapons, and international cooperation. The OPCW is vigorously pursuing international cooperation projects. With the participation of the Governments of the Netherlands and the United Kingdom

we have just launched an innovative programme which targets scientists and engineers from developing countries. A major component of what we call the "OPCW Associate Programme" relates to the development of the skills and experience required to operate effectively in the context of the modern chemical industry. The programme is supported by a number of chemical companies which are prepared to take in trainees and to involve them in their daily activities. In addition, intensive training in aspects of chemical manufacturing, plant safety, and the operations of chemical companies, is provided at a university facility in the United Kingdom. As the programme proves its success, it could be expanded to a regional level - with individual projects for Latin America, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East.

30. The Convention has to remain flexible if it is to respond adequately to new threats and challenges. It already has a mechanism for responding to dangerous scientific and technological developments. It should also have the capacity to provide effective instruments to cope with "human" threats. I am talking here of chemical terrorism. This is a global threat, and any effective cure must also be global in nature. Even before universality is achieved, I believe that the Convention could be made more effective if its institutional and political framework were used to establish greatly enhanced links and cooperation between national antiterrorism agencies and disaster relief organisations. These are, of course, suggestions which could be pursued further at the CWC Review Conference in 2002, hopefully with the participation of those countries that now still remain outside of the regime.

31. To be fully efficient and successful any international organisation must be adequately funded. I mentioned earlier that the rapidly increasing membership of the OPCW testifies to the international community's trust and confidence that it has done a good job, and that it will continue to do so. The Organisation must be adequately funded if it is to deliver on the increasing demands which are being made of it - be it in the areas of disarmament and verification, or in the field of international cooperation and assistance. Any significant widening of the gap between the financial resources and the Convention-mandated responsibilities of the OPCW could eventually damage the credibility of the Organisation and might slow down, if not reverse, its momentum towards universality.

32. The relationship agreement between the OPCW and the United Nations, which has been signed just a few days ago, opens up possibilities for broad-ranging cooperation. I intend to maximise these opportunities to the fullest extent possible. Only with the active assistance of the United Nations will the OPCW be able to implement its mandate with a maximum of efficiency and transparency. The Chemical Weapons Convention is the child of the United Nations. The United Nations is responsible - in loco parentis - for ensuring the well-being and success of its offspring. On behalf of the OPCW, I would also like to express my gratitude to the Department of Legal Affairs, and to Mr Hans Corell, for the support, flexibility and understanding which the United Nations consistently demonstrated during these negotiations.

33. The OPCW has four mandates - disarmament, non-proliferation, assistance and protection, and international cooperation. It will fulfil all of these mandates when it achieves universality. I hope that, as chemical weapons are destroyed, States Parties will be prepared gradually to place on the promotion of peaceful use of chemistry at least the same emphasis and resources as are required for the maintenance of a reliable non-proliferation regime. From an organisation created to rid the world of chemical weapons, the OPCW would ultimately evolve into an organisation to promote the use of chemistry to the benefit of all nations. This would be an evolution reflecting the world's self-transformation, from confrontation and distrust into the productive pursuit of peace and prosperity for all humankind.

Thank you.

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