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ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION
OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

- Draft -

OPCW VISIT BY THE INSTITUTE FOR HIGH DEFENSE STUDIES
(INSTITUTO ALTI STUDI PER LA DIFESA)

OPENING REMARKS BY

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DIRECTOR-GENERAL

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[Acknowledge attending authorities including military ranks as appropriate]

Excellencies,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great privilege for me to welcome you at the headquarters of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). I appreciate the fact that you have chosen to visit the OPCW during your tour to the Netherlands. My very first visit to Italy in my capacity as Director-General of the OPCW, in April of last year, included a visit to the “Centro Alti Studi Per La Difesa” (CASD). It was indeed a privilege to address a distinguished audience comprising senior government officials engaged in advancing policy objectives in the field of defense and national strategy by drawing upon the knowledge and experience from diverse academic fields of study. The CASD is actively creating a bridge between various disciplines and it is precisely these interactive and fruitful exchanges which make their due contribution to advancing the objectives of international peace and security.

I would also like to extend my deep gratitude to the Government of Italy and the National Authority of Italy whose relentless efforts and support to the Chemical Weapons Convention have been indispensable to the collective endeavour of making the CWC a success in disarmament and non-proliferation. Italy’s dedication and contribution to the Convention and its implementation are admirable and a source of strength to our mission.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

While the past century has been one of the most destructive in human history, it has at the same time witnessed the finest human impulse to establish strong ethical and legal frameworks for a more humane international order. The work of the OPCW is an essential part of this collective effort. Your keen interest in our work is welcome because the OPCW needs the support of all influential segments of global society. We are operating in a constantly changing international security environment and we count on the knowledge and experience of policy-makers and practitioners to meet new threats and challenges. Most importantly, we must remain vigilant and committed to the Chemical Weapons Convention as a durable barrier against chemical weapons. Collaboration and cooperation are the key factors that allow us to advance this common overarching goal.

Distinguished Guests,

It was not too long ago, in 1997, that the Chemical Weapons Convention entered into force. This unique Convention establishes a complete, comprehensive and legally-binding ban on an entire category of weapons of mass destruction, namely chemical weapons. It creates a comprehensive international verification regime to ensure the destruction of declared chemical weapons stockpiles. Simultaneously, the Convention provides a series of measures to prevent the re-emergence and the proliferation of such weapons; establishes mechanisms in the area of assistance and protection to States Parties against the use or threat of use of chemical weapons; and, finally, promotes international cooperation for the peaceful uses of chemistry.

As the Chemical Weapons Convention concludes its 15th year of operation, we take stock of the benefits and achievements this Treaty has brought about and the challenges it is facing in the future. In the short span of 15 years, the CWC has become a cornerstone of the global disarmament and non-proliferation architecture. The work of the OPCW as the CWC's implementation agency and its track record of achievements testify to the success of the Convention.

Standing strong at 188 Member States today, the OPCW demonstrates successful multilateralism in operation. It is a forum for consultation and dialogue, enabling States to exchange views and reach agreement - often on matters of sensitive and complex political nature - with the common objective to progress towards the Convention's effective implementation.

The elimination of existing stockpiles and chemical weapons production capacity lie at the very heart of the CWC. The verification of the destruction of declared chemical weapons thus provides a sound basis for States Parties' confidence in the Convention. Given the large stockpiles and production capacities at the time of the Convention's entry into force, this process has also been resource demanding. Almost three quarters of the declared chemical weapons stockpile will soon have been destroyed and it is expected that the remainder will be eliminated in the foreseeable future. The Russian Federation and the United States of America, as the two largest possessor States, are making steady progress towards the complete destruction of their respective stockpiles.

While the two countries will not be able to meet the final extended deadline established by the Convention at the end of April of this year, the Conference of States Parties has taken a decision that will allow both States to fulfil their obligations, accompanied by enhanced confidence-building measures and increased transparency.

The future of the OPCW, however, will require our relentless efforts to ensure that the CWC remains effective into the long-term future. The Convention has endowed us with a range of measures and tools which contribute to upholding this important norm:

First, we are actively working towards the continued strengthening of our industry monitoring regime, an important safeguard against the re-emergence of chemical weapons. The goal that chemistry and the production of chemicals remain exclusively dedicated to peaceful purposes is advanced through regular inspections at relevant industry facilities around the world. To date, the Organisation has conducted a total of 2200 inspections in 82 countries. Furthermore, States Parties have decided to increase the number of inspections at chemical production facilities to ensure a further strengthening of the inspection regime. In addition to these activities, State Parties are called upon to establish effective controls covering the manufacture, transfer, and use of dual use materials. These measures contribute to enhancing capacities to prevent, detect and respond to theft, sabotage, and unauthorised access and transfer of chemical materials – a common objective for Governments, chemical industry and the international community.

Secondly, we enhance our support and assistance to States Parties for the effective implementation of the Convention. Comprehensive national implementation measures ensure that the Convention's international obligations are universally applicable to all citizens of States Parties. Through regional meetings, internships, mentoring programmes, training and tailor-made legislative assistance, among other activities, the Organisation supports States Parties in their day-to-day implementation of the Convention.

Third, we continue to promote universal adherence to the Convention. The fast pace of accession to the CWC during the past 15 years is an accomplishment and it demonstrates the international community's strong commitment to the chemical weapons' ban. Nevertheless, we continue to work towards universality of the CWC and encourage the 8 States not yet Party, namely Angola, Egypt, Somalia, Israel, Syria, Myanmar, North Korea, and South Sudan, to join the Convention. The inhumane nature of chemical weapons and the long effort that led to their total prohibition have established a global norm. It offers both a security guarantee and a humanitarian purpose. Accepting to be bound by the CWC promotes both regional and global security and brings tangible benefits to States Parties including in the areas of international cooperation and assistance and protection against chemical weapons.

Finally, we are also in the process of enhancing our international cooperation programmes which are widely regarded as an important aspect of our work. The Convention puts forth the objective to advance knowledge and progress in the peaceful uses of chemistry through international cooperation efforts. OPCW programmes cover several areas in this regard including sponsorship programmes in

chemical research, the development of laboratory capacity, and specialised training in the safe management of chemicals. In addition, each State Party has the right to request the OPCW or other Member State for assistance and protection against the use, or threat of use, of chemical weapons in accordance with Article X of the Convention. Such assistance can include, among other measures, the provision of technical equipment such as chemical agent detectors, protective clothing, decontamination equipment, and medical assistance. States Parties can also opt to make a financial contribution to the Voluntary Fund for Assistance or simply declare the kind of assistance they would be able to provide in response to an appeal by the OPCW. The continued participation and contribution to this mechanism is essential to guarantee effective assistance and protection to States Parties in line with the Convention's provisions.

In our efforts to further implementation of the CWC, the Organisation is also enhancing its engagement with a wide range of stakeholders to the Convention such as the global chemical industry, States Parties and national authorities, the scientific and academic communities, civil society and other regional and international organisations. We rely on all stakeholders of the Convention to continue to reaffirm the values and norms enshrined in the Convention, to further its goals and objectives, and to work collectively to meet the challenges that lie ahead of us in the mid to long term future.

I thank you for your attention.