

A Disarmament for Peace

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Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to be here and to share my thoughts with you on the challenges facing disarmament, and its vital and intuitive link to global peace and security.

Your forum's close association with the Norwegian Nobel Committee stirs fond memories for me.

As you can imagine, winning the Nobel Peace Prize was a great honour for us at the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, or OPCW.

Indeed, it was a great honour for all of us engaged in disarmament.

For it signalled – loud and clear – that the work of disarmament matters.

That it is recognised as making the world a safer place.

At the award ceremony in Oslo, I highlighted the very tangible nature of the OPCW's success.

A sixteen-year record of achievement that had by then seen more than 80% of the world's declared chemical weapons destroyed.

Achievement underpinned by 190 countries opening their industry to inspection to prove they're not producing chemical weapons.

Achievement that has made a chemical weapons-free world a fast approaching reality.

But it was around Oslo, and in the months that followed, that the OPCW really proved its mettle.

Within a year of Syria joining the Chemical Weapons Convention in October 2013, all of its declared weapons were largely destroyed.

To be precise, 98% of some 1,300 metric tonnes.

This is the first time ever that a country's arsenal of weapons has been eliminated during an active conflict.

And this remarkable feat has fed into an ongoing global effort.

At current rates, all chemical weapons – across 98% of the world's territory and population – will be completely eliminated, not only within our lifetimes, but *within this decade*.

That amounts to more than 70,000 metric tonnes of chemical agent.

To put this figure into perspective, it takes only one drop of much of this agent to kill an adult instantly.

Imagine: the complete eradication of an entire category of weapons of mass destruction under international verification.

This will be a truly historic achievement.

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Yet, can we claim that this sort of achievement actually helps create peace?

Some argue that disarmament can only be an outcome of peace.

This sentiment seems remote from this forum's exploration of the role of disarmament in conflict resolution, mediation and peace-building – at least in relation to weapons of mass destruction.

But perhaps it is because such sentiment is based on a narrow understanding of what disarmament actually is.

And too narrow an understanding of what we mean by peace, without seeing essential points of intersection between the two.

Consider the recent and current reality in Syria.

Many of us may question whether Syria's chemical demilitarisation has made any contribution towards advancing a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

Because, as successful as the mission to eliminate that country's chemical weapons has been, there is clearly little sign of the bloody conflict abating.

Innocent people continue to be killed, and towns and cities are still being reduced to rubble.

So, what has it all been for?

The short answer is to be found in the eastern outskirts of Damascus.

There, in the suburb of Ghouta, an estimated 1,500 people perished within a couple of hours when they were attacked with the deadly nerve agent, sarin, in August 2013.

All of us were affected by the distressing images circulating in social media at that time.

Images of small children gasping for breath, painfully suffocating to death.

Images of medical workers not knowing how to treat victims writhing in agony on hospital floors.

But, a year and a half later, despite ever more violent turns in the conflict, no similar attack involving the most lethal of chemical weapons has taken place.

Further afield, the removal of Syria's chemical arsenal has delivered a clear security dividend to a much troubled region.

The threat of states using chemical weapons against each other is now extremely remote.

We should welcome that.

In recognition of this, Israel has ceased the production and distribution of gas masks for its civilian population.

And pressure is building for Egypt and Israel – as well as the four other States not yet party – to join the Chemical Weapons Convention.

In the wake of international reaction to the attacks in Syria, none of these countries can be in any doubt that chemical weapons are taboo.

But, even more importantly, the mission to eliminate Syria's chemical weapons programme reaffirmed global consensus against these barbarous weapons.

And it did so in a way that showed the glimmerings of the wider impact of disarmament that I have hinted at.

At a time when a way forward on the Syrian conflict had eluded the international community for more than two years, getting rid of its chemical arsenal was the one point on which agreement could be reached.

Specifically, it created impetus for talks on a political resolution.

While those talks did not produce a breakthrough, the fact that they could be convened showed that diplomatic momentum from disarmament can have productive spin-offs.

My hope was, and still is, that this momentum will not be lost, and that the international community will show the same determination on resolving the conflict as it did on eliminating Syria's chemical weapons.

The lesson for us, therefore, is that a true disarmament for peace can, and must work to broaden this sort of impact.

It must raise the bar higher against the use of inhumane weapons.

It must drive the wedge deeper to crush tolerance of such weapons.

And it must apply the political will it creates to non-military solutions to conflicts and building peace.

Clearly, all of this demands that we broaden our understanding of disarmament, as well as the various openings it can create for investments in peace.

Ladies and gentlemen,

My firm view is that disarmament is no more just the absence of weapons than peace is the absence of war.

To be successful, both disarmament and peace must be far more broadly based, far more active ventures.

This means two things in the experience of the Chemical Weapons Convention, which go well beyond the statistics of success I have outlined.

The first is ensuring a holistic regime that broadens the reach and impact of disarmament into peace-building.

The second is unified political will that can extend the letter of a treaty into proactive behaviour.

Let me try to unpack these ideas a little.

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Over its eighteen-year history, the Chemical Weapons Convention has consistently shown that disarmament is much more than simply removing recourse to chemical weapons.

It is about preventing them from being remade.

It is about establishing habits of making such weapons unneeded and unwanted.

And it is about enlisting science in the service of peace.

In this regard, we have traditionally spoken about four areas of activity mandated by the Convention:

- destruction of existing stocks of chemical weapons and production facilities;
- measures to prevent the proliferation of sensitive materials and technologies;
- coordination of assistance and protection measures against chemical attacks; and
- international cooperation on peaceful uses of chemistry.

What is important to note is that these activities are not consecutive parts of a grand plan.

They are integral elements of the holistic disarmament regime I have alluded to.

A regime that not only seeks to make its gains permanent, but also contributes to the creation of peace.

There has been much passionate debate on the respective importance of disarmament versus non-proliferation obligations, especially under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Some have argued that the nuclear weapon states have undermined the treaty by failing to move forward on disarmament.

Others have tied progress on non-proliferation to tangible progress on disarmament.

Yet this sort of chicken-and-egg approach misses a crucial point:

That disarmament and non-proliferation are mutually dependent and mutually reinforcing.

Disarmament gains cannot be made permanent without simultaneous measures – such as a robust verification regime – for preventing the re-emergence of banned weapons.

And, in some cases, preventing the proliferation of weapons-sensitive materials and technologies is a first-order priority.

If any proof is needed on this score, consider the stated ambitions of terrorist groups to acquire – and use – weapons of mass destruction.

Indeed, this was, and continues to be, the rationale for UN Security Council resolution 1540.

The threat of chemical terrorism is a major concern for the OPCW and its Member States as we work to enforce the global ban against chemical weapons.

Rapid global progress towards elimination of all declared chemical weapons stocks is now shifting the focus of our efforts towards non-proliferation.

This shifting of priorities requires us to build on our gold standard verification regime, which includes regular industry inspections, reporting of transfers of sensitive chemicals, and extensive monitoring and data collection activities.

I also noted the promotion of peaceful uses of chemistry.

This has a particular application for chemical, biological and nuclear weapons.

For the materials and technology behind them can render great benefits to humankind – in medicine, in agriculture, and in consumer production.

Take chlorine, for example.

It is not a manufactured chemical weapon, like the lethal nerve agent sarin – rather, it is a widely traded industrial chemical.

The same chemical used as a weapon in World War I and, more recently, in the Middle East is used to purify water and sustain life.

Yet, when misused, chlorine can choke and kill.

I would therefore caution strongly against seeing promotion of peaceful uses of such technology as a less important or ‘soft’ pillar of global disarmament.

It is a vital extender of the disarmament mission into peace building.

It is my contention that peace becomes a far more durable commodity, if it has science on its side rather than working against it – especially given the emerging strategic landscape.

Certainly, we are witnessing astounding progress in science and technology, rapid globalization of the chemical industry, and spectacular advances in communications.

Along with the clear benefits they bring, these developments are also challenging traditional ways of implementing global non-proliferation norms.

In response, we need to re-position our endeavours.

We cannot, for instance, oversee every new chemical substance or production application in such a rapidly changing environment – nor should we try to.

Monitoring and inspection activities must be supplemented, and eventually overtaken, by the creation of a proactive bulwark against misuse of science among its practitioners.

We need to collaborate with scientists and industry, not seek to control them.

We need to nurture a culture of responsible science in our research institutions, in our universities, and in our schools.

And we need to encourage our scientists to develop a world view and ethical framework that helps them contextualize their research.

This needs to start from the very beginning.

For example, think about how far we have travelled in relation to environmental awareness.

Through concerted efforts to foster greener policies in our schools and in our societies, we have shifted attitudes to the point where sound environmental practices have become part of our daily routines.

Clearly, wrong habits and negligent behaviour can be changed.

It is with this purpose in mind that we at the OPCW have revitalised our approach to education and outreach.

We have launched a broad range of new activities, materials and e-learning tools to increase awareness of the dangers posed by misuse of dual-use technology.

We have strengthened our cooperation with civil society, NGOs, research institutes and think tanks.

We have expanded our reach into universities and schools, right down to elementary school level, through more interactive formats.

We are brainstorming with educators and reaching out to international organisations to enhance the effectiveness of our efforts.

The OPCW organised a highly successful international conference for this very purpose at its headquarters last September.

And, most recently, we have initiated work, under OPCW auspices, to develop a code of ethics for scientists.

These are important building blocks for the bulwark I referred to.

A bulwark that sees scientists working instinctively for peace.

A bulwark whose construction starts, and finishes, with education.

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This long-term view seeks to change mindsets – and nurture a new army of self-disarming scientists, talking to policy-makers and working in the service of peace.

In the interim, we have been, and continue to be, well served by the provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

The Convention is arguably the most successful treaty in the history of multilateral disarmament.

Almost two decades on, it remains the only legally binding international instrument banning an entire class of weapons of mass destruction.

A treaty that has 190 Member States, bound together through a strong network of mutual assistance and support.

A treaty that equally commits all of its Member States to the same rights and obligations.

But, as comprehensive as the Convention's provisions are, they are little more than fine words on paper without the political will that inspires its implementation.

For political will fuels the holistic disarmament regime I have described.

The same political will which mobilized the international community to eliminate Syria's chemical arsenal was what guided negotiations on the Convention through the 1970s and 1980s.

And it continues to guide consensus decision-making among our Member States to this day.

I will not hide the fact that negotiation of the Convention was well timed to gain from the new spirit of cooperation between Russia and the United States at the end of the Cold War.

And the chemical atrocities being perpetrated in the Iran-Iraq war at that time clearly focused negotiators' minds, in addition to heightening public interest.

Cynics might also draw attention to the dwindling battlefield utility of chemical weapons in national military doctrines and planning.

But this should take nothing away from a simple rule:

If you have political will on your side, it doesn't matter how you acquired it – you must always use it.

Given our achievements over the past eighteen years, we at the OPCW have a strong sense of obligation.

As a matter of course, we exchange best practices with other disarmament institutions – whether on verification methods, conduct of inspections, monitoring technologies or data collection.

We especially hope our swift response in Syria can inform contingency planning further afield.

And we hope the spirit of cooperation in this unprecedented international effort can serve us well for future opportunities.

But, however diligently the OPCW shares the secrets of its disarmament success, one thing is clear.

Without political will, disarmament is stillborn.

Without political will, disarmament simply cannot take the bold steps required to help shape global peace and security.

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What I have tried to do here is to paint a picture of how disarmament efforts can, and do, contribute to peace.

In fact, I have proposed that disarmament can be truly effective only when it also creates the conditions that make its gains endure.

I have done so based on the experience of the Chemical Weapons Convention, whose implementation my organisation has the obligation – and honour – to oversee.

And I have purposefully done so without exaggerating the nature of the investment in peace that disarmament can make.

Because to pay off, such an investment must be broadly based.

Any veteran of multilateral negotiations will tell you that this is not easy to achieve.

As I noted in Oslo, the history of arms control has shown no lack of passion.

Yet, when so much is at stake, passion must take care to ground itself in reality, if it is to achieve its ambitions.

As the great Nelson Mandela said, “Vision without action is just a dream, action without vision just passes the time, and vision with action can change the world.”

Let me end, therefore, by reminding you of what Alfred Nobel had in mind for awarding the Peace Prize: “to the person who shall have done the most or the best work for fraternity between nations, for the abolition or reduction of standing armies and for the holding and promotion of peace congresses.”

Despite their historical reference points, these very pragmatic instructions invite us to consider disarmament as progressive investments in peace.

This will continue to guide our work at the OPCW.

To achieve, and to build on, practical steps towards a future completely free of chemical weapons.

A future that can inspire more ambitious efforts on disarmament.

A future that safeguards a durable peace for all humanity.

Thank you.