



ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION
OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

**CEREMONY TO COMMEMORATE THE TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE
CHEMICAL WEAPONS CONVENTION AND THE OPCW**

STATEMENT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL

His Majesty King Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands,

Her Royal Highness Crown Princess Victoria of Sweden,

H.E. Mr Bert Koenders, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands,

The Honourable Mrs Pauline Krikke, Mayor of The Hague,

H.E. Dr Christoph Israng, Chairperson of the Conference of the States Parties,

Excellencies,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am deeply honoured to welcome you to this Commemorative Ceremony. We are gathered to mark the 20th Anniversary of the entry into force of the Chemical Weapons Convention and the founding of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

We have come together to rededicate ourselves to peace, security and progress. Those are the abiding objectives of the Chemical Weapons Convention and the essence of all our endeavours at the OPCW.

The presence of His Majesty makes this an even more memorable event and signifies the commitment of the host country to the goals of the Convention. I would also like to acknowledge the valuable support extended to the Organisation by the Dutch Government and the city of The Hague.

The participation of all our honoured guests is a testament to the broadest support for the noble aims of our Convention. I offer to you all my sincere gratitude.

I should also like to thank senior officials from States Parties who sent messages of felicitations as well as regional organisations such as ASEAN.

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As we commemorate 20 years of our collective endeavour for the permanent abolition of chemical weapons, we pay homage to the memory of countless victims across the world.

Many survivors continue to endure painful suffering despite the years that have elapsed since exposure. Some are present here today. They remind us of the human toll when morality is recklessly abandoned and universal norms callously breached.

The Convention and the work of the OPCW represent the most effective response to such cruelty; a ray of hope illuminating a dark shadow on our history.

Years of dedicated work and persisting resolve have brought the world together on a united platform against this violence.

Our collective journey to banish forever the evil of chemical weapons has reached momentous landmarks.

The Chemical Weapons Convention began to be implemented in 1997 as an unprecedented international agreement designed to eliminate an entire class of weapons of mass destruction.

For twenty years, the words of the treaty have been turned into deeds by States Parties to the Convention. In an exemplary spirit of cooperation and consensus, they have made the OPCW a multilateral organisation with few parallels – its substantial contribution to peace was recognised in the 2013 Nobel Peace Prize award. The dedication of the OPCW staff, both past and present, has been crucial to the success of the Organisation and is worthy of commendation.

At present, 95 percent of the large and dangerous stockpiles of declared chemical weapons have been verifiably eliminated.

Thousands of verification-related inspections have been conducted.

It is a daily occurrence for the chemical industry somewhere in the world to be inspected as part of a regime that builds mutual confidence and trust.

The OPCW has developed assistance and protection procedures and international cooperation programmes for the benefit of all of its Member States.

Nearly 5,000 people have participated in programmes relating to peaceful uses of chemistry. International cooperation activities facilitate capacity building and national implementation, and they promote good practices in chemical manufacturing and safety.

The Organisation enjoys the support of the global chemical industry; our cooperation with them is unique in the history of disarmament and a symbol of the industry's sense of responsibility.

Our network of cooperation continues to grow to engage an ever-wider audience that includes international organisations, academia, the scientific and technological communities and civil society.

This is important in view of the adaptation that is necessary in order for the Organisation to remain focused on preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons; this will remain our enduring mission. Greater collaboration is also crucial so as to effectively deal with new threats and security challenges.

Several other programmes are under way to make the Organisation fully responsive to contemporary demands. We will continue to invest in understanding the impact of science and technology and will spare no effort in our education and outreach programmes to promote ethical practices and to strengthen both the prohibition and prevention of the misuse of chemistry.

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In Syria, the OPCW has faced its greatest test of commitment as well as resilience and has proven its adaptability to meet new and unexpected challenges, including through innovative approaches consistent with the object and purpose of the Convention.

Despite an ongoing civil war, an ambitious chemical demilitarisation programme was undertaken. The cooperation with the United Nations as well as the support of over 30 contributing States Parties and the European Union were critical to this endeavour. Our work in Syria is not yet finished.

It is of grave concern that we continue to see reports on the use of chemical weapons. Such use of chemical weapons has been universally condemned. The international community has unanimously called for the perpetrators to be brought to justice.

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Despite the path being sometimes difficult, the culture of cooperation and accommodation has, throughout its history, enabled the Organisation to forge ahead. This should continue to characterise our approach to current challenges and future tasks.

We must stay on course to destroy the remaining stocks of declared chemical weapons as planned. The destruction of abandoned and old chemical weapons will also continue under the verification of the OPCW.

While 192 countries subscribe to the Convention, it falls just short of universality. I once again appeal to Egypt, Israel, North Korea and South Sudan to join the Convention without delay.

It is also a vital objective to ensure that all our States Parties continue to make steady progress towards full implementation of the Convention in their domestic jurisdictions is. This constitutes the most practical means of addressing the contemporary threats relating to chemical terrorism. On its part, the Organisation has established a Rapid Response and Assistance Mission (RRAM) to provide a State Party with support for emergency measures in the case of use of chemical weapons.

Effective domestic implementation also means fulfilling the requirements of UN Security Council resolution 1540 (2004). The OPCW, with its institutional capacity, experience and implementation support record, is uniquely placed to advance the objectives of that resolution.

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Our States Parties can rightly take satisfaction from the accomplishments of the two decades of OPCW as reaffirm their commitment to the full realisation of its goals.

The success of the OPCW is owed to the commitment of its Member States, which have spared no effort in building an efficient and vibrant multilateral Organisation.

The progress we have made by working together for a noble goal shines brightly as a contribution to disarmament and non-proliferation and thereby to global peace and security. This collective endeavour has strengthened humanitarian norms, transformed attitudes and highlighted the possibilities of multilateralism.

I have no doubt that States Parties will continue their efforts to make the Convention a document of enduring validity that is universally respected. I am also confident that they will further strengthen the OPCW to make it forever responsive to the imperatives of peace and security in the world.

Thank you.