



ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION
OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

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SIXTY-FIFTH SESSION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
FIRST COMMITTEE
(DISARMAMENT AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY)

STATEMENT BY

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THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

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Mr Chairman,

We are witnessing a time of renewed hope in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation. Both the expectations and the resolve of the international community to seize this opportunity were underlined at the High Level Meeting held at the United Nations on 24 September 2010.

This Committee has an important role to play in guiding our common aspirations towards productive outcomes. I am confident that it will acquit itself with distinction.

I represent an Organisation that was born over a decade ago in a similar environment representing unity of purpose on issues of international peace and security. At that juncture, the conclusion of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and its entry into force in 1997 signified a major milestone in the progress towards a world free from weapons of mass destruction.

Today it gives me great pleasure to address this important forum for the first time since taking over as Director-General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and to apprise Member States about the progress we have made towards realising the aims and objectives of the CWC and its future potential as well as challenges.

In terms of disarmament, to which the OPCW currently devotes 85% of its inspection effort, over 62% of the total declared stockpiles of chemical weapons have already been verifiably destroyed. Three of the six declared possessor States – Albania, A State Party and India have completed the elimination of their stockpiles.

Two possessor States, namely, the Russian Federation and the United States of America shoulder the major burden of responsibility given the massive size of their respective stockpiles. Despite the daunting technical, financial and safety challenges, they have made, to their credit, steady progress towards fulfilling their disarmament obligations under the Convention. To date, the Russian Federation has destroyed over 19, 000 metric tonnes of chemical warfare agents. This represents 50% of its chemical weapons stockpiles. On its part, the United States has destroyed more than 22,000 metric tonnes of chemical-warfare agents, or 80% of its stockpiles. In spite of their commitment to the CWC, which deserves appreciation, these two countries have indicated that they will not be able to meet the final destruction deadline in April 2012 as set under the Convention.

The Libyan Arab Jamahiriya and Iraq continue to work cooperatively with the OPCW with a view to the expeditious destruction of chemical weapons in their possession or on their territory - as in the case of Iraq which has declared a quantity of chemical weapons that were secured and rendered unusable under the work authorised by the UN Security Council.

As we approach the completion of the destruction of declared arsenals of chemical weapons, the OPCW will be expected to progressively concentrate the larger percentage of its resources to the non-proliferation dimension. This entails attention to a number of areas.

First. A crucial element in the non-proliferation regime of the Convention concerns its effective domestic implementation. This requires that all States Parties establish and reinforce the administrative and legislative measures necessary to prevent and redress any breach of the Convention by their nationals and in any area under their jurisdiction or control.

We have an intensive programme of technical assistance through visits to capitals and routinely support Governments and Parliaments in the preparation of comprehensive legislation and provide guidance on administrative measures. Our effort is greatly facilitated by voluntary financial contributions received from individual member States with the European Union providing a significant share of those funds.

Compared with other relevant disarmament instruments, OPCW Member States have performed better in implementing their CWC obligations. 96% of our Members have designated or established a National Authority and almost 50% of the States Parties have enacted legislation covering all key areas of the Convention. Yet, as it is obvious, there is still a need for half our membership to make further progress in implementation. The relevance of such measures for counter-terrorism purposes is also self-evident.

Second. The OPCW will need to continue refining and taking to an adequate level the number and intensity of industry inspections, so as to ensure that all categories of relevant facilities are adequately covered by its verification regime, including what are referred to as “other chemical production facilities”, or OCPFs.

A well functioning inspection regime covering the global chemical industry is serving the Convention’s non-proliferation goals. Since the CWC entered into force in 1997, over 1,900 inspections have been carried out at industrial sites on the territory of 81 States Parties.

The global chemical industry as a major stakeholder has, through its constructive attitude and cooperation, contributed significantly to the success of the industry verification regime.

Third. The surveillance of transfers and trade in chemicals will need to be made more rigorous. All States Parties should have the ability to fully monitor the import and export of chemicals of concern by enhancing the knowledge and skills of their relevant governmental authorities, especially the Customs. OPCW conducts regular training programmes for customs officials in our States Parties and these programmes are expected to be augmented further. Our cooperation with the World Custom Organisation in such activities has been fruitful.

In the context of terrorism, the OPCW fully participates in activities organised to support the implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1540 and the UN Global Counter Terrorism Strategy. Our own activities are guided by the OPCW Working Group on Terrorism and cover subjects of high contemporary importance such as safety of chemical plants and table-top exercises designed to test preparedness in the case of terrorist use of chemical weapons.

Apart from its core obligations in the area of disarmament and non-proliferation, the CWC also establishes for all its States Parties, the right to seek assistance and protection against chemical weapons. With heightened concerns about the possible use of chemical weapons in terrorist attacks, there is growing interest amongst our Members to increase their national capacities for emergency response and consequence mitigation.

A major exercise on the delivery of assistance is taking place during this week with the cooperation of the host country, Tunisia. The exercise called ASSISTEX III will have over 400 participants and observers from our States Parties and international organisations, including the United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA).

International cooperation in the promotion of the peaceful uses of chemistry is a matter of particular significance to OPCW member countries that are developing or with economies in transition. The Organisation has been quite successful in providing a large number of well targeted programmes that aim at building national and regional capacities in the area of peaceful uses of chemistry as well as national implementation. The OPCW envisages organising a special event in 2011 on “International cooperation and chemical safety and security” on the occasion of the International Year of Chemistry.

Mr Chairman,

The near universal support that the CWC has received is evident from its Membership which currently stands at 188 strong. This means that only 7 members of the United Nations remain outside the treaty.

Universality is indispensable to the success of the Convention. Only thus can there be an assurance that all countries of the world have legally accepted the prohibition on chemical weapons. Given the inhumane nature of chemical weapons, and the fact that they are no longer regarded of much military value, the CWC should be accepted by all nations as a moral imperative. Acceptance of the Convention can also serve as an important confidence building measure, especially in the region of the Middle East.

The 2010 NPT Review Conference has decided to convene a Conference in 2012 on the Middle East WMD free zone. The Final Document of the Conference envisages the contribution of international organisations such as the OPCW in terms of sharing their experience and lessons learnt. Given the importance of this initiative to regional peace in the Middle East, the OPCW looks forward to its participation and contribution to this endeavour.

Mr Chairman,

I have provided a brief overview of both our progress and the tasks ahead of us. The General Assembly adopts on an annual basis a resolution on the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention which is sponsored by Poland and adopted traditionally by consensus. This resolution manifests the strong support that we receive from the United Nations which is a matter of great satisfaction.

Allow me to conclude by saying that as the international community looks forward to opening a new chapter in disarmament and non-proliferation, it can draw lessons and indeed confidence from achievements already made as epitomised in the success of the CWC.

The culture of adherence to multilateralism and consensus building through constructive engagement has led to the emergence of a concrete example of success of a multilateral disarmament regime. The same spirit can lead to yet greater achievements and progress towards realising the UN Charter's vision of a peaceful and secure world.

Thank you.
