

The Hague, 2 February 2012

Director-General's remarks

at the meeting of the Hague Programme on Disarmament & Non-Proliferation Efforts on the outcomes of the 7th Review Conference of the Biological Weapons Conference

1. I wish at the outset to express my appreciation to The Municipality of The Hague for co-ordinating the work of The Hague Programme on Disarmament & Non-Proliferation Efforts. Bringing together organisations who are working in the area of disarmament and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction is a very useful initiative. I would like to acknowledge and commend in particular the support offered by Mrs. Astrid Bronswijk, Director of the Department of International Affairs at The Hague Municipality, in arranging this important event.

2. States Parties to the Biological Weapons Convention recently met in Geneva to review the operation of that treaty. It is a matter of satisfaction that this 7th Review Conference was a success. The BWC and the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) have important commonalities. Together they establish comprehensive legal prohibitions against two of the three categories of weapons of mass destruction. These two treaties share the same historical roots in the age-old taboo against the use of poison in warfare; a shared ancestry that was emphasised in the preamble of the CWC which reaffirms the principles and objectives of, and obligations assumed under, the BWC. Here at the OPCW, we are now embarking upon preparations for our own Third Review Conference,

which will take place here in April 2013, so we are especially interested in the outcomes of the BWC Review Conference.

3. For their success, both treaties need to be implemented effectively and must be universally accepted. I believe that the lessons learned in promoting the fundamental objectives of one treaty can be of relevance and use in the case of the other even though the paths to implementation may differ. There are areas of common interest between both treaties, for example: national implementation, science and technology, assistance and protection and international cooperation for peaceful purposes.

4. The dynamic nature of scientific progress is creating an increasing convergence of chemistry and biology making it even more necessary for the two regimes to engage in closer cooperation, as was recognised in the final document of the BWC Review Conference. It reflects a topic which is mentioned often but about which further clarity would be useful. Experts are of the opinion that there is a growing overlap between chemical and biological production technologies that might have implications for the Chemical Weapons Convention. Such advances afford the global community many benefits but also bring with them certain risks. Therefore, they call for vigilance to ensure that scientific progress does not detract from the imperative of exclusively peaceful applications.

5. These developments and our reflections on them point to the need to gain a good understanding of the nature of the scientific transformation that is taking place. In this regard, I have asked the OPCW Scientific Advisory Board to study this issue and report on it. Last year,

the SAB therefore established a temporary working group on the convergence of chemistry and biology. Recognising the need for additional expertise, particularly from the life sciences and the biotech industry, the SAB appointed as members of the group individuals working in these fields. A number of recommendations have already been made and will be followed up. The working group will meet in 2012 and 2013. This issue will also be on the agenda of an international workshop organised by the International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry (IUPAC) taking place in Switzerland later this month.

6. While both the BWC and CWC predate the current state of science that which continues to rapidly evolve, they are both flexible enough to adapt, through mechanisms such as the review conferences. It will be important to continue to monitor developments at the intersection of chemistry and biology, in order to ensure that no gaps open up in the coverage of both treaties. I therefore welcome this meeting which should offer an opportunity to identify areas of common interest more concretely and to initiate a dialogue that serves our common purposes. It would also be worthwhile considering how the kind of interaction that we are engaging in today can be institutionalised.

7. On the part of the OPCW, as we embark on a period of transition in the light of positive developments such as the destruction of over three-quarters of the declared stockpiles of chemical weapons, and changes in the contemporary security environment, the forging of close cooperative relations with partners with common interests will be a high priority.

8. I will conclude with the hope that your interaction today will yield new perspectives on some of the crucial issues that will come under discussion. And, I wish you a successful meeting.