

**Towards a World Free of Chemical Weapons:  
The Role and Work of the OPCW on the Path to Global  
Disarmament**

**University of Buenos Aires, Law Faculty  
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**Ahmet Üzümcü, Director-General OPCW**

Deputy Dean Alberto Bueres, Excellencies

Distinguished guests, Dr Joran Varieso

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am deeply honoured to receive this award of an *Honoris Causae* degree from the University of Buenos Aires.

I understand that your university has produced the highest number of Nobel laureates among Spanish-speaking universities. Your own faculty's famous alumnus and Latin America's first Peace Prize recipient, Carlos Saavedra Lamas was among them.

Argentina has been an active contributor to the OPCW's mission in support of global chemical disarmament.

I acknowledge, in this respect, my predecessor, Ambassador Rogelio Pfirter. His efforts strengthened the organisation in ways that have equipped it to meet the significant challenges we are facing today, both in Syria and beyond.

Importantly, your policy-makers have also been imaginative in devising new approaches to extend the reach of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

This has especially been the case in the area of education and outreach. It was on this subject that I addressed this morning a regional conference convened by your National Authority for the Convention.

Argentina's efforts to ensure that present and future generations of scientists understand their responsibility to protect against misuse of chemistry owe much to broad consultation, including at this university.

It is a special honour, therefore, to receive this distinction at an institution representing the finest traditions of Argentinian scholarship and humanism.

And it is with great pride that I will now carry this honour and association with the University of Buenos Aires into the future.

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Over the course of the OPCW's seventeen-year history, we have recorded tangible results in eliminating an entire class of weapons of mass destruction across the globe.

With 190 states now party to the Chemical Weapons Convention and more than 80% of declared chemical weapons destroyed so far, our goal to achieve a world free of chemical weapons is far from being a distant prospect.

The current mission to eliminate Syria's chemical weapons is bringing that goal even closer. It presents a welcome opportunity to rid the world of one of the last remaining chemical arsenals.

What many people do not realise, however, is that our day-to-day work is much more than simply verifying the elimination of chemical weapons – as important a task as this is.

The OPCW acts as the guardian of a comprehensive regime geared towards not only overseeing the destruction of chemical weapons, but also preventing their re-emergence. In addition, the OPCW provides valuable assistance for enhancing chemical security, as well as fostering peaceful uses of chemistry.

In my lecture I propose to describe our work in the context of the challenges we face, both current and emerging.

I will do so by first charting the long journey we have travelled to establish a regime that has allowed us to record the achievements recently honoured by the Nobel Peace Prize Committee.

A regime that serves to enhance our confidence in effective multilateralism and the prospect of more far-reaching disarmament endeavours.

A regime that also links science, security and economic development in ways that engender hope for the success of such endeavours well into the future.

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It was almost one hundred years ago, in April 1915 near Ieper in Belgium, that chemical weapons were first used on a large scale.

By the time the First World War ended, more than 50,000 tonnes of chemical agent had been deployed by both sides of the conflict. This resulted in almost 1.3 million casualties, including some 85,000 fatalities.

No-one could have foreseen this sort of carnage at the time the first attempt was made to ban the use of chemical weapons by the Hague Convention of 1899.

Accordingly, the devastating impact of these weapons prompted a push to devise a more binding norm, resulting in the 1925 Geneva Protocol.

But, while it prohibited use of chemical and biological weapons, it did not ban their possession and production.

By the end of the Cold War some six and a half decades later, tens of thousands of chemical weapons had been amassed, including highly lethal nerve agents.

But, most tragically, the Geneva Protocol did not prevent chemical weapons from being used with brutal regularity across the world – including against civilian populations.

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The impunity with which such attacks were perpetrated and their indiscriminate nature, especially in the Iran-Iraq War, finally rallied the international community to take decisive action.

It was against this backdrop – almost one hundred years after the Hague Convention – that a comprehensive global ban against chemical weapons came into being.

Following long and arduous negotiations in Geneva, the Chemical Weapons Convention was concluded in 1992, entering into force in 1997.

It is hard to overstate the singular achievement that this represented.

Even now, more than twenty years after agreement was reached on it, the Chemical Weapons Convention remains the only legally binding international treaty banning an entire class of weapons of mass destruction, under international verification.

It is comprehensive, prohibiting not only the use of chemical weapons, but also their development, production, stockpiling, transfer and retention.

It is non-discriminatory, committing all of its Member States, without exception, to its prohibitions and obligations. All those possessing chemical weapons must destroy their stockpiles, and all Member States must ensure,

on an ongoing basis, that chemistry is used only for peaceful purposes within their jurisdictions.

And, most importantly in contributing to the Convention's unique success, its provisions are backed by strict international verification. In addition to inspections verifying destruction of chemical weapons and the peaceful purposes of commercial industrial facilities, the Convention includes a challenge inspection mechanism. Any member can call for investigation of another member on the basis of well-founded concerns over compliance.

Further afield, the Convention also obliges Member States to assist one another in the event of chemical weapons ever being used against them.

It likewise promotes cooperation and exchanges of knowledge and expertise to help all Member States reap the full economic and scientific potential of their chemical sectors.

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The OPCW was established as an independent organisation, supported by Member States, to oversee implementation of all aspects of this multifaceted treaty.

It is a regime that builds trust and transparency because of how it is structured and implemented, nurturing and extending partnerships between governments, scientists, industry and civil society.

Our record of activity belies our relatively small size – fewer than 500 staff with an annual operating budget of only EUR 70 million in 2013.

Since the Convention's entry into force in 1997, OPCW inspectors have conducted some 2,500 inspections in more than 80 Member States at many of the 5,000 facilities of interest for implementation of the Convention.

At the same time, the OPCW has provided extensive support to Member States through cooperation programmes to help strengthen national-level implementation of the Convention, as well as assistance and protection measures against chemical attacks or incidents.

The OPCW has also expanded opportunities for peaceful uses of chemistry that bring humane, development and economic benefits to Member States with economies in transition.

These include training for chemists and engineers in best practices for safely managing dangerous chemicals in an industrial environment, as well as funding for research projects and internships at research institutions around the world.

On the disarmament front, the OPCW has verified the destruction of some 82%, of all chemical weapons stocks declared by eight Member States, including Syria.

And almost 93% of declared production facilities worldwide have been destroyed or converted to civilian use.

The two major possessor states, the Russian Federation and the United States, are well on track to achieving their destruction targets, as revised in agreement with Member States in 2011. Three others – Albania, India and another State Party that has requested anonymity – have completed destruction of their stockpiles.

The few remaining possessor states are moving quickly to complete destruction. Libya has completed destruction of its chemical weapons stocks, with mainly component chemicals left to be eliminated, and Iraq is proceeding with a plan to destroy remnants of chemical weapons on its territory.

And work is now underway in Syria.

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The tragic conflict in Syria has presented a seemingly insurmountable challenge for the international community to adapt a common approach.

But the shocking sarin attacks in the Damascus suburb of Ghouta last August – confirmed by a UN investigation to which the OPCW contributed crucial expertise – changed this.

For the first time since the conflict began, the international community was able to reach unanimous agreement on one aspect in relation to the crisis – namely, that Syrian chemical weapons must be eliminated.



Russia and the United States played a pivotal role in this regard, following Syria's move to join the Chemical Weapons Convention on 14 September. Their Framework Agreement paved the way for a historic decision by the OPCW's Executive Council on 27 September on an accelerated programme for eliminating Syrian chemical weapons by mid-2014. This decision was endorsed that same day by unanimous adoption of UN Security Council 2118.

The OPCW was quick off the mark in implementing this programme. The first team of inspectors arrived in Damascus on 1 October, and the OPCW-UN Joint Mission in Syria was established on 16 October.

The mission recorded several early successes ahead of set target dates, including submission by Syria of a complete declaration of its chemical weapon stocks and sites, the destruction of all unfilled chemical weapon munitions, and the functional destruction of production facilities.

What this means is that Syria is no longer able to produce chemical weapons – a significant milestone that was reached only one month after the Executive Council's 27 September decision.

The next milestones, however, present challenges of a much greater magnitude.

The Council moved quickly to agree detailed requirements for the destruction programme in a decision taken on 15 November. This key decision calls for the removal of all chemical weapons from Syria, in

accordance with a request by the Syrian Government, for destruction outside the country.

The 15 November Council decision required putting into place complex arrangements for the transportation and destruction of Syrian chemical weapons – arrangements that have required unprecedented levels of international support and coordination.

Under a transportation and destruction plan supporting the Council decision and the OPCW's Syria Trust Fund, Denmark and Norway are providing vessels and, along with Russia, China and the United Kingdom, military escorts for the transportation of the chemicals.

Mustard agent and priority chemicals, will be transported to the Italian port of Gioia Tauro for trans-loading to a US vessel, the MV Cape Ray, for destruction at sea. This will involve a process of hydrolysis - breaking down chemical agents with hot water and a caustic compound. The resulting effluent will be stored on board the Cape Ray before being transported to other destinations for disposal.

Some of the priority chemicals will be transported to the United Kingdom for disposal at commercial facilities in that country. Germany has so far offered to receive effluent resulting from destruction of mustard agent for disposal on its territory.

All other chemicals - largely industrial toxic chemicals - will be treated and disposed of by the commercial companies. At the request of the Executive Council, the OPCW initiated a tender process, backed by the OPCW's Syria

Trust Fund. This process resulted in the award of contracts to two commercial entities, in Finland and in the United States.

There have been well-publicised delays in Syrian shipments of chemicals to the port of Latakia, where they are being loaded onto the Danish and Norwegian vessels. These delays have been due to a variety of reasons, including the security situation within Syria.

Just over half of all chemicals have now been moved out of the country. If the Syrian authorities hold to their revised timetable of removing all chemicals by 13 April – and some additional chemicals from currently inaccessible sites by 27 April, we hope that the mid-2014 deadline for destruction can still be achieved.

Let me add here also that, throughout the course of this mission, the OPCW has been very conscious of what our mandate in Syria entails.

This is to achieve Syria's full chemical disarmament – nothing more, or, as I prefer to say, nothing less.

For there can be no doubt that removing chemical weapons from a country where they have been used will deliver valuable humanitarian and security benefits.

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While Syria is rightly focusing our efforts at present, the OPCW has not lost sight of the wider strategic context of our work – and of new challenges ahead.

The most immediate of these challenges – one that flows directly from Syria's accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention – is to persuade the six countries that still remain outside the Convention to join it, without delay and without conditions. These countries are Angola, Egypt, Israel, Myanmar, North Korea and South Sudan.

There is a very sound reason why the Convention is the fastest-growing treaty in the history of multilateral disarmament.

Whatever issues feature in the national and regional security considerations of states, they are unified on one underlying principle – the indivisibility of chemical security.

This principle holds that no human being should be exposed to the untold suffering caused by chemical weapons – weapons that cause agonising death, weapons that permanently scar and incapacitate their victims, weapons that can have no justification under any circumstances.

The international community's reaction to the recent chemical attacks in Syria has only served to reaffirm its unity on this principle.

At the same time, the scientific and commercial benefits of membership should not be understated. They serve to significantly broaden the

foundations of trust and cooperation between states in the service of all humanity.

The attention that the Nobel Peace Prize has generated in relation to chemical disarmament will, I hope, compel states not yet party to the Convention to reconsider their position, or to speed up internal processes that they may have already initiated to accede to the treaty.

The OPCW stands ready to offer them every assistance in this regard.

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Changes in the strategic environment since the end of the Cold War mean that we must seize the opportunity not only to broaden adherence to the Convention – we must also guard against the re-emergence of chemical weapons. This is becoming increasingly important as we draw closer to completing destruction of existing weapons and production facilities.

The increasing degree to which economic interdependence and rapid advances in technology and communications are shaping our security in a globalised world has several important implications for the Convention's implementation in this regard.

At the same time, increased and much faster access to information is posing new challenges for how we protect sensitive materials and technologies against misuse, without curtailing access to their beneficial applications.

This is no longer just a case of guarding against transfers of chemical weapons-relevant materials to states unwilling to comply with relevant international norms. The rise of international terrorism has heightened proliferation risks in ways that existing non-proliferation regimes are ill-equipped to address.

Well-resourced non-state actors have made no secret of their aim not only to acquire weapons of mass destruction, but also to use them. The fact that deterrence and sanctions measures have little sway over such groups means that we will need to be more alert to this threat – and more imaginative in how we deal with it.

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The OPCW has very strong fundamentals for taking stock of, and responding to, these challenges. Foremost among these are partnerships we have forged with the scientific and research community.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of these partnerships.

Insights into science and technology, and proactive measures for sharing them, underpin full and effective implementation of all operational articles of the Convention – from the definition of chemical weapons, to verification and monitoring activities – from investigation of alleged use, to cooperation on peaceful uses of chemistry.

The OPCW Scientific Advisory Board plays a key role in this respect. It continually reviews scientific and technological developments on the basis

of their potential impact on the Convention. Board members provide independent advice, drawing also on their own extensive networks to test thoroughly assessments shared with the OPCW.

In this way, the Board functions as a vital early-warning system discoveries and new technologies that could be misused. It is also a vehicle for ensuring verification methods are kept up to date. This role is only set to increase in importance over coming years.

More broadly, the habits of consultation that we have developed with scientists are also crucial for maintaining awareness of the need for vigilance at the national level – and for communicating this in relevant and accessible terms.

Scientists’ interaction with non-scientists in policy-making circles in facilitating implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention has served this purpose well. It has helped scientists make their advice more widely understood among all key stakeholders, including foreign ministry officials, legal experts and customs officers who may have limited scientific knowledge.

This is vital for the simple reason that full confidence in disarmament and arms control measures can only be built on transparency and sound verification methodology closely informed by science.

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At the same time, such a top-down approach from our scientific elites, working closely within and with governments, will also require bottom-up reinforcement.

We need to instil the highest ethical standards in our scientists at the very beginning of their careers, especially those with access to substances and facilities which could be misused.

Indeed, this challenge is being addressed by the Regional Meeting on Education and Outreach currently underway at the Argentinian Foreign Ministry, which I addressed earlier today.

In support of such initiatives and with the cooperation of Member States, the OPCW will be unrolling tools and materials for awareness-raising, education and outreach purposes, some of which are already available on the OPCW website.

Our purpose is not only to nurture more ethical scientists, but also more capable and rounded ones.

It is especially important for young scientists too develop a world view from the very beginning of their careers. However specialised their current and future work might be, it is important that they are able to contextualise its broader purpose and applications in order to serve it responsibly.



There are few fields where this is more important than those that provide access to materials and technologies that can be misused for harmful purposes.

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Industry has been no less vital a partner for the OPCW than has science, with a somewhat different set of challenges.

Without enjoying the full confidence of industry, there can be no effective means of inspecting commercial chemical production facilities to ensure that they are engaged in exclusively peaceful activities.

Protection of commercially sensitive information was written into the Chemical Weapons Convention specifically to address this issue. In fact, industry played a strong and productive role in informing negotiations on the Convention in this area.

In light of some of the challenges I have outlined, we need to be more creative in how we engage industry as a partner – not only in shoring up compliance with the Convention, but also in developing proactive strategies. These strategies could usefully address the potential proliferation implications of new production technologies and the globalization of the chemical industry, including realignments in its production base.

In the first instance, this means adapting inspection procedures and timetables in ways that maintain the confidence of industry and governments in our confidentiality arrangements.

We could also consider broader and more imaginative ways of engaging the private sector. There is enormous potential for stronger public-private partnerships, which are already making a difference in relation to new, non traditional multilateral challenges.

To this end, we will be seeking to draw on the expertise and perspectives of industry in bolstering compliance with the Convention, and even engaging industry in some of our outreach and training endeavours.

The recent tender process for destruction of chemical weapons was a first for the OPCW – and there is no reason why it should be the last such effort to extract new efficiencies out of our cooperation with commercial entities.

The message is clear: security is not just the responsibility of governments – industry and commercial entities also have a part to play.

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Civil society has been a longstanding partner in our activities and, even before the establishment of the OPCW, in international efforts to prohibit chemical weapons.

For academic and other forms of informed public discourse can, and do, make a vital contribution to policy making.

The Chemical Weapons Convention – and, along with it, the OPCW – stand to benefit from a revitalised, informed and sustained academic discussion. Such exchanges offer an essential contribution to official processes of policy formulation and implementation, especially at a time of rapid change in the strategic environment.

Universities, research institutes, think tanks and other NGOs are a source of ideas for us in the OPCW. They are also a source of expertise on issues such as education and outreach, and national implementation.

Finally, they serve as effective partners for OPCW outreach, as facilitators for OPCW activities, and as “messengers” on behalf of the OPCW. In other words, civil society organisations can reach into constituencies and areas that we in the OPCW cannot.

The OPCW is undergoing a process of transition in which it needs the fullest possible engagement of civil society to consider and assess possible ways of adjusting its priorities and work practices for the challenges ahead.

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It was in recognition of our important partnerships with an ever broadening set of stakeholders, including civil society, that I announced in Oslo that the OPCW would use the Nobel prize money to establish annual awards.

These awards will recognise outstanding contributions to advancing the goals of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Our hope is to harness the renewed interest in chemical disarmament as a result of the Peace Prize to encourage continuing excellence in this area, among as wide a community of stakeholders as possible.

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In my remarks here, I have chosen to focus on the OPCW's future challenges, no less than on our sixteen-year record of achievement in support of the lofty goals of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

For we are an organisation that is not only conscious of our success – we are also eager to share it for the benefit of all humankind.

It is my fervent hope that the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to the OPCW will help reinvigorate multilateral disarmament processes more broadly, as called for by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in an address to the Conference on Disarmament on 21 January.

Referencing the 2013 award, the Secretary-General called on delegates to “make 2014 a year of creativity and action.”

Certainly, the Chemical Weapons Convention has set a high bar for new endeavours in disarmament.

Endeavours which are ambitious and realistic.

Endeavours which proceed from good will and consensus, and from firm principles of verification.

Endeavours which engage all possible stakeholders, and deliver palpable and enduring security benefits for all.

The Chemical Weapons Convention has shown that multilateralism can deliver practical disarmament success, and must do so again.

And for the OPCW, this success drives us not only to hasten the reality of a world free of chemical weapons, but also to ensure that global disarmament gains are made irreversible for all time.

Thank you.