

**Education for Peace:  
New Pathways for Securing Chemical Disarmament**

**Director-General OPCW, Ahmet Üzümcü**

**22 September 2014**

Excellencies,  
Prof. Voorhoeve,  
Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure and honour to welcome you to this conference, “Education for Peace: New Pathways for Securing Chemical Disarmament.”

Many of you are very familiar with our Organisation, but I would like to particularly acknowledge those of you who are here for the first time.

I hope that the information, exhibits and activities that we have laid on for you over the next two days mean that you leave here with a much greater awareness of the OPCW.

As Director-General of the OPCW, I have long been a staunch advocate for enhancing our disarmament efforts through more effective education and outreach.

And I have sought to ensure that the OPCW is an organisation that is responsive to, and engages in, new ideas that make our mission more effective.

Because we have an ambitious agenda before us:

- not only to broaden our community of stakeholders,
- but to empower them – scientists, industry, policy-makers, civic society and students – to help us consign chemical weapons to history, forever.

Indeed, the ongoing effectiveness and achievements of the Chemical Weapons Convention will increasingly depend on our broader interactions in this vein.

This was strongly emphasised at the Third Review Conference in April last year, during which education and outreach featured in over a quarter of all statements during the General Debate.

A handful of States Parties have since then taken this message to heart in developing new initiatives.

I especially commend Argentina for hosting the first regional meeting on education in the responsible use of knowledge on dual use chemicals in Buenos Aires in April specifically devoted to education and outreach, which I had the pleasure of addressing.

It is for these reasons that the OPCW is hosting this important meeting here at our headquarters in The Hague – the first ever on this important subject.

We are doing so at a particularly important juncture in the fight against chemical weapons.

As we fast approach the long cherished goal of global chemical disarmament, we need to position ourselves to ensure that we can make our gains permanent.

We only need to look to our recent past and what lies ahead to see why.

For most of our seventeen-year history, the OPCW has hardly been a household name.

Indeed, one media commentator not so long ago referred to us as a “sleepy backwater of disarmament.”

Our preference had always been to work behind the scenes with quiet determination in overseeing the destruction of the world’s chemical arsenals.

This changed dramatically last year with the award to the OPCW of the Nobel Peace Prize and the mission to eliminate Syria’s chemical weapons programme.

Our current high profile, together with intense international scrutiny of our work, makes it more important than ever for us to be able to explain our mission more clearly to more people.

Certainly, there is a good story to tell.

Less than one year since the OPCW's Executive Council adopted its historic decision, 97% of Syria's 1,300-tonne chemical weapons stockpile has been destroyed.

This is, of course, part of a much bigger story.

86% of declared chemical weapons have so far been destroyed across the globe, and the Convention is subscribed to by 190 States.

Clearly, global chemical disarmament has recorded remarkable successes.

But this is not the end of this story – far from it.

We now need to harness renewed interest in chemical disarmament and ensure that it outlives the headlines to focus on what must come next.

This relates to the much harder, less publicly visible task of making sure chemical weapons never return.

It is my firm belief that education and outreach are crucial building blocks for establishing an effective and durable bulwark in this respect – ones to which we must keep adding.

Let me tell you why I believe this to be the case by tracing the OPCW's experience in engaging existing constituencies and creating new ones.

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As a science-based treaty, the Chemical Weapons Convention, and those of us who implement it, work on the basis of a self-evident principle – namely, that scientific discovery excites.

We are truly fortunate to be living in an era of unprecedented scientific advances and technological innovation.

Technologies once confined to the realm of science fiction are today a reality. Breakthroughs and new discoveries are continuing to capture our imagination and find their way into our daily lives.

From the outset of negotiations in the 1970s, scientists played a seminal role in laying the foundations of what was to become the Chemical Weapons Convention.

And they continue to do so because of the inherently dual-use nature of the materials and technologies we deal with.

Their services are vital for ensuring that the excitement, which scientific and technological discovery generates, serves the cause of peace, rather than of war.

This means alerting us to discoveries that could challenge implementation of the Convention – as well as those that could enhance it.

To this end, the OPCW has been fortunate in being able to source high-quality advice and expertise from its subsidiary body, the Scientific Advisory Board, which is well known to most of you.

But the Board's work has also alerted us to the need for more broadly based communication – using our partner scientists to help us communicate to more scientists.

This was the basis for creating the Temporary Working Group on Education and Outreach, whose members have generated many of the ideas that will feed into our discussions here over the next two days.

Let me explain what I mean by how we need to broaden our engagement in this regard.

As I suggested earlier, the OPCW's ongoing success will increasingly be measured not by weapons destroyed, but by weapons not re-built.

With 15,000 new chemicals added to the chemical abstracts data base every day, we cannot, of course, hope to control every new chemical.

Nor should we try to.

Collaboration must now become the new form of control that underpins non-proliferation efforts.

This means more than ensuring that policy-makers and scientists understand each other in devising mechanisms for preventing the proliferation of illegal weapons.

It also means a bottom-up approach in reaching out to the emerging and future generations of educators and scientists to shape their worldview.

We need to ensure that they appreciate the broader context in which they practise their research, and how they in turn mentor their students.

The renowned biochemist and science-fiction author Isaac Asimov once said that “we need to deal with the situation in which science gathers knowledge faster than society gathers wisdom.”

It is for this reason that the OPCW has worked hard to enhance awareness of the often fine line between beneficial and harmful applications in chemistry through education programmes and outreach to academia.

In short, we want to strengthen efforts towards fostering a culture of responsible science.

This will ensure that current and future generations of scientists understand – and respect – the impact that their work can have on security.

Our aim is not only to nurture more ethical scientists, but also more capable and rounded ones – scientists who have a practical understanding of the broader strategic context of their research.

I have personally sought to deliver such a message at forums that have not traditionally attracted experts, including the EuroScience Open Forum and ECSITE – an annual gathering of science museum executives and educators.

And Technical Secretariat staff have engaged ever widening circles in the scientific establishment, universities and even high schools with this same purpose in mind.

Our central message is this.

Responsible science – science that at all times constrains its potential to harm and proactively engages on global issues – must be an instinctive professional trait for all of its practitioners around the world.

As Albert Einstein put it, scientists have a moral responsibility to humanity.

This is why the OPCW puts great value on engaging scientists around the world through our extensive programme of co-operative activities.

These include participation in scientific conferences, fellowship programmes and training in best practices to safely manage chemicals in a complex industrial environment.

We need to ensure that bright young people share our excitement about the potential of science and the role they can play through better mentorship at the earliest possible stage.



I am sure that every person in this room remembers a teacher that made a difference in their lives, someone who showed them something about the world – or about themselves – that changed their lives.

It could be a school trip, or a lesson, that sparked a question that ignited a passion and ultimately may have propelled a career.

These sorts of interactions are key to how we are scoping our education and outreach endeavours.

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To better capture the imaginations of scientists and students, we are moving rapidly towards the development of more dynamic, interactive vehicles for communicating our goals.

We have rolled out a host of new materials and tools designed specifically to assist our education and outreach endeavours.

Much of the inspiration behind them is drawn from our interaction with other international organisations, as well as observing how science centres reach a broad public with innovative exhibitions using cutting-edge multi-media technology and participative design.

The “Give Peace a Chance Exhibition” at the Museon, a few minutes walk from here, is a case in point. You will have the opportunity to visit the exhibition at the end of the conference tomorrow.

Students, including many of you here today, also have an especially important role to play in this respect as commentators and facilitators for OPCW activities, as well as “messengers” on behalf of the OPCW.

Indeed, some of you have done so, or are doing so, as interns at the OPCW. On that note, I would like to thank our current interns for their hard work in supporting this current conference.

Today, I am pleased to announce to you the launch of the OPCW’s web-based education resources. My colleagues will describe the new initiative in more detail later this morning, but simply put the OPCW is now making available a range of educational tools and materials developed over recent months in collaboration with our external partners.

The tools available range from stimulating videos, a lesson plan to accompany one of the videos and a student workbook aimed at high-school chemistry students.

I would encourage you all to look at this new resource, use it if you are involved in teaching and share it widely with your students and colleagues.

Many of these tools, and additional tailor-made ones, also serve a crucial purpose in assisting our Member States better implement their obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention.

For the scientific establishment is far from being the only constituency we need to engage in a more multilayered way.

Getting the six countries still outside the Chemical Weapons Convention to join as soon as possible remains a top priority.

But we have not lost sight of the importance of achieving common standards and practices in implementation across our entire membership.

Many of our States Parties still need a lot of help, and it is with this in mind that we have developed a range of practical tools.

These include checklists for legislators, model laws and E-Learning Tools.

In a few weeks we will be launching the Legislative Assistance Support Tool (LAST), an online tool which will help States Parties to draft their implementing legislation at the click of a button

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But we should not overlook those potential advocates for chemical disarmament and non-proliferation who reside outside the communities I have so far mentioned.

A daunting challenge before us is how to engage the broader public over the longer term as we focus attention on post-destruction priorities.

It is with this in mind that we conceived the Fires Project – a series of films related to war and disarmament.

The intention behind these films is not to convey information about what it is that we do and how we do it, but rather, to affect a personal experience of chemical weapons in their viewers.

You will shortly have the opportunity to view the first of the two films so far completed, “A Teacher’s Mission.”

It is especially relevant to this event, since it takes up the idea of teaching responsible science in a high school setting.

In fact, the teacher who inspired the film, and who is its main subject, Chrétien Schouteten, is here with us today and will be sharing his insights in the course of our discussions.

The second Fires film, “Ich liebe Dich,” is even more powerful.

It features the experience of a survivor of the chemical attack on Halabja in March 1988, Kayvan, and his life in Vienna, which since his medical treatment there almost thirty years ago has been his home.

The idea that any of us could encounter Kai over a game of table football in a prosperous western city is a very powerful one.

It makes us think twice about how chemical weapons have affected human lives as we can also see in modern-day Iran and, more recently still, in Syria as well.

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Finally, I would mention here the need for more effective use of real-time communication tools as well as expanding our activity and visibility in social media.

We have seen participation in our social media networks increase exponentially over the course of the Syria mission, with ever more connections being made between disarmament and other global challenges that serve to challenge conventional wisdom.

We still have some way to go in focusing attention on our post-destruction mission in a more strategic way.

But we have made a strong start in the wake of the upswing of hits on our website and the number of followers we have on Facebook and Twitter.

This strong start has been accelerated by our Digital Diplomacy Action Plan, a framework to increase our reach over the longer term through digital platforms, launched in January this year.

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From this brief outline, I have sought to give you a sense of the new messages that we are crafting, with new media, and of the new constituencies we are cultivating.

These range from helping our members better implement the Convention, to building the foundations for traditions of responsible science,

from teaching students that chemistry is about more than lab work, to sensitising the general public to the importance of eliminating the scourge of chemical weapons.

Clearly, there is more that we can be doing, and it is for this purpose that we have convened this conference.

We need not only to explore new techniques, but also to develop capacity to absorb feedback from our target audiences, as well as work with them to create new ones.

And we need to learn from each other as we do so.

Our imaginations should draw inspiration from the vital contribution that disarmament is making to durable peace.

An important historical marker for focusing our efforts will be the centenary of the first large-scale use of chemical weapons in Ieper in Belgium on 22 April 2015.

We will be making a special effort to commemorate this important date in a way that informs our efforts to create in the present a future that learns from the past.

This conference, bringing together students and civil society, politicians and professors from across the world is the perfect opportunity for us to broaden our community and exchange ideas on how we can push the boundaries of learning

not only to convey information as effectively as possible,

but also to directly engage people from all walks of life in what we do, why we do it, and what this means for all of us.

And, most importantly, to make them active partners in our collective undertaking.

I have no doubt that the expertise gathered here over the next two days – during our panels, as well as in less formal exchanges – will greatly enhance efforts in this area.

Let us exercise care and judgement to make scientific discoveries a liberating, civilising force, not a leap into conflict and carnage.

Above all, let us educate and empower through participation and interaction.

With that, let me welcome you, once again, to the OPCW.

I wish you frank and productive discussions and hope that they serve to make our common endeavour ever more successful.

Thank you.