

SIXTEENTH ANNUAL MEETING OF NATIONAL AUTHORITIES

OPENING REMARKS BY

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Excellencies,

Distinguished participants,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I warmly welcome you to OPCW Headquarters for this 16th Annual Meeting of National Authorities of States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention.

I wish to extend a special welcome to the delegation from Myanmar, as well as those from our partner institutions, the African Union Commission and the Caribbean Community and Common Market Secretariat.

These past twelve months have been a truly historic period for the OPCW and States Parties.

The Syria mission continues to test the resilience and responsiveness of the Convention, and we have recorded some remarkable achievements.

98% of all chemical weapons declared by Syria have been verified as destroyed – little more than a year since the Executive Council agreed to a destruction programme.

But, as central as this mission has been for the OPCW, we have not lost sight of other challenges looming on the not-so-distant horizon.

By 2016 we will be well on the way to transitioning to a new phase in our operations.

Much of the focus of our efforts will shift from destruction of chemical weapons to preventing their re-emergence.

And this will happen against the backdrop of a changing strategic landscape: increasing globalization of chemical industry, spectacular advances in science, technology and communications, and a growing proliferation threat from non-state actors.

I have on several occasions emphasized that this recalibrated agenda will be a more difficult, far more complex one.

It will demand increased vigilance and a bigger tool kit, as well as better use of the tools inside it.

And it will fall to National Authorities, and their interaction with the Technical Secretariat, to underwrite our success.

The Secretariat, for its part, has started drafting a paper that takes a longer-range, strategic perspective on the work ahead.

It will outline key results to be achieved by the middle of the next decade in core areas such as verification, capacity development, and engagement with relevant stakeholders.

Already over the next two years, as the task of chemical disarmament nears completion, we will need to adapt, if we are to be successful in meeting new implementation challenges – not only in traditional areas, but also new ones.

And, as we do so, we will need to help each other to ensure that we all have access to the same tools and are using them in the most effective way possible.

What does this mean in practice?

As a first principle, we must meet and harmonize bottom lines in national-level implementation.

As encouraging as recent accessions to the Convention have been, as well as progress towards new ones, it is crucial that we see universalisation of the Convention in qualitative as well as quantitative terms.

To this end, the Technical Secretariat is rolling out several new initiatives to help States Parties address current shortfalls, as well as to help prospective States Parties to prepare for membership.

These include the Influential Visitors Programme, which provide invited representatives – of both States Parties and non-States Parties – with information for championing passage of implementing legislation in their national systems.

To supplement such initiatives, and to extend their reach, the Secretariat has rolled out a series of six e-learning modules designed to build capacity – so far, in English, French and Spanish, with other languages to follow shortly.

The most recent addition was the Legislative Assistance Support Tool, or LAST – an internet-based tool which provides States Parties with user-friendly legislative and legal support, as well as updated information on ratification and implementation of the Convention.

There can be no question that national implementing legislation remains a vital bottom line for every State Party – nor should there be any doubt that gaps in this regard can compromise the effectiveness and reach of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

More broadly, the Secretariat also continues to drive National Authority mentorship and partnership projects for facilitating peer exchanges and expanding interaction between national focalpoints, with a view to enhancing relevant skills and expertise.

But we need to go much further, faster.

We need to better harness new communication tools to improve the efficiency of our information exchange at a time when proliferation challenges are becoming more unpredictable.

Receiving information in real time is crucial, if we are to react in an effective way – especially in relation to proliferation in a globalised world that is no longer the sole preserve of States.

In July 2014, the Secretariat launched a new communication tool designed to enhance our responsiveness in this respect – the Secure Information Exchange, or SIX.

The SIX system provides a direct, electronic channel for the secure exchange of confidential information between the Secretariat and States Parties.

I commend those State Parties that have already started using the system, and urge others to do likewise.

But there is still more we can be doing to share more information by electronic means.

I take this opportunity to remind you of the advantages of transmitting declarations for Schedule 1 facilities and activities electronically through EDNA software, whose latest version was made available in January.

In all this, the right human resources remain critical to our success.

As we transition to the post-destruction phase, we will look to National Authorities to sponsor and develop new expertise in their jurisdictions that can better contribute to inspection and verification activities of the future.

Our international networks of experts and laboratories are the bedrock of our defence against chemical weapons, and they will remain so.

The Technical Secretariat must be able to source expertise whenever it needs it, and we will continue to encourage national facilities to complement each other in cost-effective ways.

As part of this effort, we are expanding capacity alongside OPCW Headquarters by building a multipurpose training laboratory within the Rijswijk facility.

The multipurpose training facility will be used for training or cross-training external participants as well as for internal training. The laboratory will be equipped with several gas chromatograph-mass spectrometer instruments and a liquid chromatograph-tandem mass spectrometer.

We also need to think more broadly about where we need to be devoting more attention and resources.

Chemical safety and security is a case in point.

Several of our States Parties have hosted valuable workshops on management of chemical safety and security over the past year in South Africa, China and, for African states, in Germany, and there are plans to expand these to reach more of our members in Asia and Latin America.

Information and technical exchange has been greatly facilitated by National Authorities through regional and sub-regional meetings, to discuss specific challenges shared in particular parts of the world.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge the support of Armenia, Chile, Kenya and India in hosting this year's Regional Meetings.

Finally, let me turn to the outermost circles of where our reach should extend, if we are to continue implementing the Chemical Weapons Convention effectively.

One thing that rapid advances in science and technology teach us is that we cannot rely solely on our own resources.

Our best defence against the re-emergence of chemical weapons is to build as broad a community of stakeholders as possible, and to empower more of these stakeholders to contribute to the work of non-proliferation.

This understanding is at the heart of our efforts to expand education and outreach efforts, in keeping with the recommendations of the Third Review Conference.

In cooperation with the Secretariat, Argentina has pioneered useful work in this regard by hosting a first-ever regional meeting on this subject in April.

The Technical Secretariat followed suit with an international conference held here at OPCW Headquarters on 22-23 September, titled “Education for Peace: New Pathways for Securing Chemical Disarmament”.

This event gathered more than one hundred experts from government, science, industry, academia and civil society to exchange information on messages, tools and techniques for improving education and outreach in disarmament and non-proliferation.

A vital overarching contribution has been made by the Temporary Working Group on Education and Outreach, which I established in 2012 in response to wide recognition of poor awareness of the Convention in the scientific community, academia and industry.

This group’s work has engendered a useful debate within the OPCW and among States Parties, notably at recent meetings of National Authorities.

It has now finalized its report, which makes several valuable recommendations.

Among these, the report proposes – rightly, to my mind – mainstreaming education and outreach as a core activity for the OPCW.

It also recommends establishing a separate advisory body for sustaining efforts in this regard, in which National Authorities would play a key role.

In the course of your deliberations over the next days, I invite you to be expansive and ambitious about what National Authorities can bring – not only to how we position ourselves for the transition period, but also to how we best equip ourselves to deal with it.

Our interaction, and the expertise and resources that support this interaction, form the backbone of the Convention.

One which we must continue to broaden and strengthen as we turn our focus to making chemical disarmament gains permanent.

Thank you for your attention.

I wish you a productive meeting and look forward to catching up with you at this evening's reception.