

**18<sup>th</sup> International Chemical Weapons Demilitarisation Conference (CWD)**

**Park Plaza Hotel, Victoria, London, United Kingdom**

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**4 June 2015**

Honourable Minister Julian Brazier,  
Distinguished Participants,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for your kind invitation to address this year's gathering, the 18<sup>th</sup> edition of this important meeting.

I greatly appreciate the initiative of the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (DSTL) to convene this conference, and I further extend my gratitude to the Government of the United Kingdom for hosting this important event.

As we all know, the work to destroy a single chemical weapon can be arduous and is often beset with hazards.

To safely dispose of these weapons requires specialised knowledge and novel solutions to overcome technological, environmental and even political challenges.

This work should always be conducted with adherence to best safety practices, and must have proper safeguards in place to ensure that no harm is done to people or the environment.

Engagement with local communities and civil society is a critical ingredient to build confidence in destruction technology and facilities.

This sort of work can also be costly and should respect relevant legal and regulatory parameters.

I would like to commend all those engaged in the destruction of chemical weapons.

They sit at the frontline of disarmament, working to ensure that there can never again be recourse to such weapons.

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When I last addressed this conference two years ago, our progress to rid the world of chemical weapons was continuing apace.

At that time, with 189 States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention, the treaty underpinning the global ban on such weapons was quietly being implemented behind the scenes.

More than 80% of declared chemical weapons had been verified as destroyed by the OPCW.

Though there still remained significant quantities of chemical weapons to be destroyed, we had moved beyond initial delays in destruction.

Revised destruction schedules, agreed by all States Parties, were well on course to being met.

The likelihood of chemical weapons being used seemed increasingly remote.

Then Syria happened.

In August of 2013, images of civilians in Syria affected by chemical weapons flooded social media.

The confirmed use of chemical weapons in the Damascus suburb of Ghouta triggered an unprecedented series of events.

In September 2013, Syria signed on to the Chemical Weapons Convention, and the OPCW Executive Council agreed to a fast-track programme to remove and destroy Syria's chemical weapons.

A team of OPCW inspectors was dispatched to Syria to oversee the elimination of Syria's chemical weapons programme.

Within the OPCW every part of the Organisation was engaged in this goal.

Amid extremely tight deadlines, our inspectors assisted Syrian officials with an initial declaration.

We worked hand-in-hand with our UN partners to set up the logistics for what was a complicated international mission, with many interlocking parts.

And in early 2014, the OPCW Executive Council adopted a decision authorising the destruction of chemical weapons possessed by Syria at commercial facilities outside Syrian territory.

By June 2014, the OPCW had verified the removal of 1,328 metric tonnes of Syria's Category 1 and Category 2 chemical weapons.

These stocks had been transported overland and transferred to maritime vessels for delivery to destruction facilities.

A US vessel – the *Cape Ray* – would be outfitted with two field deployable hydrolysis systems, for destruction of 581 metric tonnes of Category 1 chemicals, among the most lethal of Syria's stocks.

The effluents from this process and other chemicals have been destroyed in facilities in Finland, Germany.

An exceptional level of international support and cooperation made this all possible – with more than 30 OPCW States Parties supporting the mission with financial and in-kind contributions, which I welcome.

At this point, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Government of the United Kingdom for its in-kind and financial contributions towards the elimination of Syria's chemical weapons programme.

The contributions by the UK and many other States Parties were instrumental for the success of the mission to destroy the Syrian chemical weapons programme.

Those of you who work in chemical demilitarisation can appreciate the challenges and complexity of such a mission – from a technological, security, logistics and political perspective.

To date, all of the Category 1 chemical weapons, and a total of 93.1% of the Category 2 chemicals removed from Syria have been destroyed.

This represents a combined total of 98.6%, including isopropanol, previously destroyed in Syria.

I will not delve further into technical details, as my colleague will expand further on the current state of play regarding Syria in presentations later today.

However, I should tell you that, despite these remarkable achievements, our work in Syria remains unfinished.

We continue to clarify some aspects of Syria's declaration, and work is ongoing to complete the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons production facilities.

And disturbing claims of use of chlorine as a weapon in Syria continue to arise.

Last year, earlier allegations led to the establishment of a Fact-Finding Mission in April 2014.

This mission found with a high degree of confidence that chlorine had been used as a weapon in regular and systematic fashion in three villages in northern Syria.

The Fact-Finding Mission continues its work with the full support of our States Parties and the UN Security Council.

Our experts are currently analysing information related to the most recent allegations.

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Ladies and gentlemen,

Many of you know that fulfilling the obligations of the Chemical Weapons Convention is a major undertaking, particularly for possessor States.

With that in mind, we can say that today's progress in Syria is being built on the hard-won gains of preceding disarmament efforts.

Though our mission to destroy the Syrian chemical weapons programme came unexpectedly, it arrived at a moment when we were able to draw on a proven record of expertise.

Simply put, had the Syria mission come to us earlier in the life of the OPCW and the CWC, we may not have had the experience and knowledge required to carry out such an operation as effectively as we did.

Thankfully, nearly two decades of international chemical disarmament practice have borne a set of salutary lessons that helped to pave the way for success in Syria.

These lessons touch upon several areas of our work.

From logistics to security, diplomacy to verification – the full range of activities required for the OPCW to implement the Chemical Weapons Convention has been amply demonstrated in Syria.

In further recognition of our collective efforts, I am pleased to note that we have reached a new milestone in ridding the world of chemical weapons.

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Last week, I announced that ninety percent of declared chemical weapons had been verified by the OPCW as destroyed.

This includes stocks of unitary weapons, such as sulfur mustard, and primary precursor chemicals for producing deadly nerve agents, like sarin.

Destruction of remaining stocks in Russia and the United States will be completed by 2020 and 2023, respectively.

Libya is currently taking tangible steps to resume the destruction of its remaining category 2 chemical weapons as soon as possible, and the OPCW will continue to monitor this progress.

Turning to Iraq, in cooperation with the OPCW and other States Parties, this country has continued to provide information on measures that are being taken to complete the assessment of declared remnants of chemical weapons.

This is being done to determine the most appropriate methods of destruction.

The declaration, verification and destruction of old and abandoned chemical weapons continue to remain a major focus for the Organisation.

To date, nineteen OPCW Member States have declared possession of old or abandoned chemical weapons.

The discovery of chemical weapon remnants of past conflicts remains an ongoing and unpredictable problem, posing similar challenges for many of our Member States.

Each year, new discoveries of chemical weapons continue to be made.

I am pleased to say that States Parties are making great strides in carrying out destruction of these weapons, and the OPCW extends every effort to ensure this process is conducted in a safe and effective manner.

With regard to abandoned chemical weapons, or ACW, China and Japan continue their cooperation in dealing with the historic legacy of chemical weapons abandoned by Japan.

To date, over 50,000 ACW items have been declared at over 90 locations – across 17 provinces – in China.

Of this total, as of May this year, the OPCW had verified the destruction of over 37,000 ACW items.

In December last year, destruction commenced at the Haerbaling site, where an estimated 300,000 – 400,000 ACW items are buried.

I saw these recovery and destruction activities first hand in September 2013, when I visited China with members of the OPCW Executive Council.

And I am hoping to witness further progress when I visit China later this week.

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Ladies and gentlemen,

The trajectory of global chemical disarmament is progressing in a positive direction.

By 2023, we expect that an entire category of weapons of mass destruction will be eliminated.

But I must caution that percentages of destruction do not necessarily translate in dividends of peace.

As the goal of global chemical disarmament nears, the chance of States employing chemical weapons becomes ever more distant to the point of now being highly remote.

There is now, however, a new threat that we must address.

That of non-state actors acquiring and using chemical weapons.

As we look to focus more on preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons, the OPCW is ramping up its activity in several key areas.

Our verification regime – comprising on-site inspections, national declarations and monitoring of industrial activities – will need to keep pace with shifting trends and changing circumstances.

Our education and outreach programmes are expanding to advocate more effectively and more widely for the responsible use of science.

Our international cooperation activities are being better pinpointed to strengthen national-level implementation of the Convention.

This is critical, particularly in regions where effective domestic implementation is hindered by weak legislation giving effect to the Convention's obligations.

We are also urging the six States not party to the Convention to join at the earliest possible opportunity.

Though we expect Angola, Myanmar and South Sudan to soon join the global ban on chemical weapons, the prospects for Egypt, Israel and North Korea doing so in the near term are less likely.

Nevertheless, we must continue to make clear that no country can justify remaining outside what is now a firmly established global norm.

A final yet no less formidable concern, as I have already touched upon, is chemical terrorism.

Several terrorist groups have expressed the desire to obtain – and use – weapons of mass destruction.

The threat of chemical weapons falling into the wrong hands is very real, and very alarming.

One need only recall the sarin gas incident that occurred in the Tokyo subway twenty years ago.

Tragically, though a dozen people were killed and hundreds more were injured in those attacks, the repercussions could have been much greater had the dispersal of sarin been engineered differently.

By anticipating and addressing the threat posed by non-state actors, the OPCW can play a role in contributing to global efforts against terrorism.

We must expand these efforts by reaching out to scientists and chemists who played a role in developing chemical weapons programmes.

Those who had previously been involved in weapons programmes can make important contributions towards preventive measures for countering chemical terrorist threats and building response capabilities to be used if we fail to prevent them.

And we must be alert to the possibility of former weapons scientists proliferating their expertise – for ideological or financial reasons – by engaging them on prevention or other peaceful endeavors.

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With a challenging disarmament agenda set against a strategic environment laden with risks and uncertainties, our work to secure a future free of chemical weapons will continue, albeit with a shifting focus.

The Convention's credibility tomorrow will hinge on our ability to plan proactively today.

Syria demonstrated that we can achieve our common goals through close international cooperation and determination.

Let us retain – and strengthen – the spirit of our collaboration to attain global chemical disarmament.

Let me conclude by acknowledging the contributions made by different partners and stakeholders represented here today to the elimination of chemical weapons over the past 18 years.

This has indeed led to the great recognition by the Nobel Peace Prize in 2013.

You should all be proud of this achievement.

You all have a share in this.

Thank you.