



ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

“Destruction and Beyond: New and Emerging Challenges for Chemical Disarmament”

Speech by Director-General Ahmet Üzümcü

3rd International Symposium on Development of CBRN-Defence Capabilities, Berlin, Germany

20 October 2015

Major General Döring,
Colonel Hettfleish,
Distinguished participants,
Ladies and gentlemen,

At the outset, I would like to thank the German Government and the organisers of this Symposium for inviting me to address this distinguished audience.

My comments today will provide a brief overview of the concrete gains made in global chemical disarmament. I will also present some perspectives on the challenges that threaten to undo our successes, and outline some measures that can be used to hinder the hostile ambitions of non-state actors.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Under the watchful eye of the OPCW, tens of thousands of metric tonnes of chemical weapons have been destroyed. Within eight years, we expect to complete the destruction of declared stocks of chemical weapons – thus achieving the wholesale eradication of a complete category of weapons of mass destruction. And with 192 countries having joined the Chemical Weapons Convention, we have achieved near universal adherence to the ban against these barbaric weapons.

That's the good news.

The bad news is that the threat horizon is shifting – and in rapid fashion.

We are operating at a time unlike any other in the relatively brief history of chemical disarmament. It is a time when hundreds of individuals have recently suffered the cruel consequences of chemical weapons. It is a time when innovations in science and technology

threaten to overtake our ability to prevent proliferation. And it is a time, only the second in recent history, when extremists are alleged to have developed and used chemical weapons to tragic effect.

Despite significant gains in stamping out the possibility of chemical weapons ever being used again, our eighteen-year old ban on these loathsome weapons is being challenged on several fronts.

So how can we adapt our regime to ensure that the taboo on chemical weapons retains its resolve? How do we thwart the determination of extremists to acquire and employ weapons of mass destruction? How can our non-proliferation regime keep pace with the rapid diffusion of materials and technology, and respond in time to stop chemical attacks from happening?

Though I cannot claim to have all the answers to these questions, I can tell you that these issues must be addressed as we carry forward our mission to put an end to chemical weapons, and achieve our goal of a world free of them.

How we do so will determine the lasting credibility of the Chemical Weapons Convention, and ensure that the OPCW remains responsive to new threats.

An investigation under a UN Secretary-General mechanism determined the use of sarin in Ghouta, near Damascus, in August 2013. The allegations of use of toxic chemicals as a weapon in Syria in 2014 and earlier this year have been investigated, and the use of chlorine as a chemical weapon has been confirmed. There have also been accusations against the Syrian Government regarding the use of chemical weapons. Further investigation will be conducted to identify the perpetrators, an area that I will expound upon later in my remarks. Regardless of the outcome of this investigation, we cannot entirely exclude the use of chemical weapons by States in the future.

However, it is generally accepted that such use has become much less likely than before whereas the use by non-state actors is now seen as the main threat.

The recent alleged use of chemical weapons by ISIS in Syria and Iraq underscores the changing calculus of chemical weapons use.

Hence I wish to direct my comments today to the subject of non-state actors.

When it comes to chemical weapons, non-state actors do not constrain themselves to the same taboos and norms that States do. In fact, these actors wantonly exploit such norms precisely to spread fear and foment terror. Innocent victims in Syria and Iraq who have come under chemical attack from chlorine and sulfur mustard are sadly indicative of this disturbing new trend.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Confronting the challenge posed by non-state actors demands fresh new thinking and the forging of new pathways for international collaboration.

To meet this challenge, we must focus on three key areas.

First and foremost, we must limit the permissive operating environments for those who wish to fabricate or use chemical weapons.

For our part, the OPCW is amplifying its international cooperation efforts to ensure that States Parties adopt and enforce national legislation that criminalises any activities prohibited under the Convention. Though a majority of OPCW Member States have put such domestic laws in place, we must press on until all States Parties have done so. We must make sure that violent extremists – and indeed, any actors that might use chemical weapons, inside or outside of their countries of origin – are held accountable for their crimes.

UN Security Council Resolution 1540 plays a similarly important role in this area. It seeks to close gaps in non-proliferation treaties and conventions to prevent terrorists and criminal organizations from obtaining dual-use materials and technologies. The obligations of Resolution 1540 in the area of chemical weapons are entirely consistent with those of the Chemical Weapons Convention. Full and effective domestic implementation of the Convention automatically enables States Parties to fulfil their obligations under 1540 in regard to chemical weapons.

Chemical safety and security is a second area which is attracting greater consideration among our Member States.

To prevent proliferation and ward against chemical terrorism, States must guard against theft or sabotage of industrial facilities that produce or store toxic chemicals and chemical weapon precursors. The security of small- and medium-sized enterprises cannot be overlooked, for many of these often lack the sophisticated infrastructure of larger facilities. In lockstep with physical security, industry should be held to the highest safety standards, whether it relates to the handling, storage or transport of dangerous chemicals.

Some three decades following the Bhopal disaster in India, the recent chemical explosions in Tianjin in China serve as a stark reminder of the tragic consequences when robust chemical safety practices are lacking. Safety measures must be actively promoted across all relevant sectors and facilities, and encompass national authorities, chemical industries, industry associations, regulators, laboratories and academia.

We must also work to ensure that first-responders to any chemical-related incident, whether hostile or accidental, are well equipped with the resources necessary to manage a crisis involving toxic substances.

Drawing back to my earlier mention of legal enforcement, industry also has a role to play here. We are enhancing our outreach to industry to ensure that States Parties are declaring all relevant facilities and activities under the Convention.

Further, industry cooperation with law enforcement agencies can help identify the illicit trade of scheduled chemicals. By tracking the movements of toxic chemicals through regional and international supply chains, we can inhibit “black market” trade, thereby reducing opportunities for their misuse.

Industry should view these initiatives as good for business, and intrinsic to its role as a responsible corporate citizen.

Science must also play its part, starting with education, the fundamental building block for the application of chemistry. In recent years, the OPCW has expanded its approach to education and outreach by launching an extensive array of activities, materials and e-learning tools to heighten awareness of the risks posed by the misuse of dual-use technology. We have done so because our future success will depend on more proactive partnerships with science and academia.

Through outreach to universities and schools, and convening of international conferences, we are seeking to instil current and future generations of scientists with a commitment to responsible science – and to do so in the service of peace and security.

Further to these aims, two dozen experts from a wide range of OPCW Member States recently collaborated to develop “The Hague Ethical Guidelines,” a set of standards that call for the solely peaceful use of science among chemistry practitioners.

I would like to acknowledge the important role that the German Government played in development of this important initiative.

A third and final area critical to preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons involves the work of international organisations.

Though preparedness and response to chemical terrorist attacks will remain chiefly the province of national jurisdictions, the interplay between international organisations and other relevant actors is of increasing importance. The response to the recent alleged use of chemical weapons by non-state actors in Syria and Iraq underscores the distinct role that organisations such as the OPCW can play in such cases.

The unprecedented mission to remove and destroy Syria’s chemical weapons was jointly coordinated and carried out by the OPCW and UN, and made possible by the contributions of no less than thirty countries, including Germany.

In addition, as of April last year, the OPCW has dispatched Fact-Finding Missions to examine allegations of the use of toxic chemicals as weapons in Syria.

These efforts, which have attracted the widespread approval of the UN Security Council and OPCW Executive Council, have concluded that chlorine was systematically and repeatedly used as a weapon in northern Syria.

This work is carrying on, as the mission continues to gather more data stemming from allegations of chemical weapons use.

The latest reports of the Fact-Finding Mission are expected to be issued towards the end of this month.

Further as pertains to Syria, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2235 in August of this year, calling for the establishment of an OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism to identify the governments, individuals or groups that have carried out, or sponsored, attacks using chlorine or other toxic chemicals.

This development represents a watershed moment for the international community's resolve to pursue allegations of non-compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention, and exemplifies the unique role that international organisations can play in this regard.

Furthermore, the Government of Iraq recently accepted the OPCW's offer to send experts to contribute to ongoing investigations of chemical weapons use in that country. Our team is preparing for deployment to Iraq in the immediate future and expects to soon report on its findings.

In concert with our on-the-ground work in Syria and Iraq, we have escalated our efforts to foster dialogue and cooperation with States Parties on the challenge of chemical terrorism.

The OPCW Working Group on Terrorism has been very active this year, and the OPCW Technical Secretariat has tabled a series of comprehensive papers for States Parties to examine and discuss major facets of this critical issue, including legal aspects, prevention measures and effective response.

In addition to this work, we are engaging with other concerned international organisations through the UN Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF), which forms part of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. A major thread of the CTITF's work involves supporting Member States to enhance preparedness and response capacities through a common and coherent framework.

Following a proposal made by the OPCW, a new mechanism of response to a chemical terrorist attack with the involvement of all relevant organisations is being considered.

Furthermore, through initiatives such as the EU CBRN Centres of Excellence, the OPCW is expanding its cooperation with EU partners to enhance CBRN readiness, from mitigation and preparedness to response and recovery.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Some have said that our current non-proliferation regimes are ill-equipped to address the threat posed by non-state actors.

I cannot agree entirely with this judgement.

As I have sought to make clear in my remarks, more can be done to harness and expand the measures available to us.

At a time when chemical weapons are likely being made and used by terrorists, we must seek novel solutions to ensure our non-proliferation regime remains practicable and does not become brittle with age.

We will need to expand and enhance engagement with the CBRN community through public-private partnerships to ensure our achievements are sustained.

What I was shown yesterday and this morning at the exhibitions was very reassuring in this regard.

No actor, no entity, no individual involved in CBRN defence is too small to contribute to the overarching goal of reducing the threat of hostile or accidental use of such materials.

It is vital that we share information, that we exchange best practices, that we build a more secure future together.

It is my firm conviction that realising a world free from chemical weapons will not be possible if we do not cooperate with one another.

I look forward to working with you to reach this common goal.

Thank you.