

**UNGA First Committee: Exchange with the High Representative
for Disarmament Affairs and other High-Level Officials**

“Increasing Capacities to Address Weapons of Mass Destruction”

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19 October 2015

Thank you, Mr Chairman.

Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

From the outset, Chairman, I would like to congratulate you for your election as the Chairman of the First Committee. I also thank you for inviting us to this important meeting to share our experiences and views.

The theme of today’s meeting: **“Increasing Capacities to Address Weapons of Mass Destruction”** is quite familiar for the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), given the extraordinary arc of experience we have traversed over the past year – and beyond.

As you are aware, we have mobilised new capacities for the historic mission to eliminate Syria’s chemical weapons programme.

And we have had to do so without compromising existing capacities for our ongoing activities.

You may recall that this time last year, with the support of more than 30 of our Member States and the United Nations, we had successfully overseen the removal of chemical weapons from Syria.

We had also verified the destruction of 98.8% of Syria’s chemical arsenal – only one year after the OPCW’s Executive Council directed us to do so.

Since then, we have focused on three areas of activity in relation to Syria:

- clarifying Syria’s initial declaration;
- coordinating destruction of 12 chemical weapon production facilities; and
- establishing the facts in relation to allegations of use of toxic chemicals as a weapon.

Although these processes are continuing, they have rendered tangible results.

The OPCW Declaration Assessment Team earlier this month issued a report identifying several issues we hope engagement with Syrian authorities will help to resolve.

Ten of the 12 production facilities have now been destroyed, with the remaining two to follow suit before the end of this month.

And the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission has issued findings confirming the use of chlorine as a chemical weapon in northern Syria.

The United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 2235 (2015) in August, which authorised the creation of an OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mission to identify the perpetrators or sponsors of these and other attacks in Syria.

Arrangements for the Mechanism are now well advanced, and they will involve a component based in The Hague.

Mr Chairman,

Never before has the OPCW operated at such an active tempo under such intense international scrutiny.

And we have had to do so at a time of transition for the organisation, as we seek to recalibrate our priorities and our operational posture for the post-chemical weapons destruction phase.

For this phase is rapidly approaching.

With more than 90% of declared stockpiles destroyed, we are well on track to achieving complete eradication of all declared stockpiles by 2023.

As we recalibrate, we need to consider two factors.

First, much destruction-related work remains to be done.

Abandoned chemical weapons may well pose a challenge beyond 2023, and old chemical weapons will continue to be discovered.

We must also plan for the possibility of new members declaring a stockpile.

Clearly, therefore, there will continue to be a need for applied chemical demilitarisation knowledge.

Second, the threat horizon has changed dramatically.

While the likelihood of states using chemical weapons against one another has been all but removed, non-state actors have sought not only to acquire such weapons, but also to use them.

Although the OPCW has no specific counter-terrorism mandate, it is nonetheless bound to prevent the use of chemical weapons – by any actor, under any circumstances.

For what we are tackling now is not a potential threat, but very credible allegations of actual use.

Persistent reports of chemical weapons being used by ISIS in Syria and Iraq are a pressing case in a point.

Taken together, these two factors have several implications for the OPCW's future responsiveness and effectiveness.

- We cannot afford to allow skills and expertise within the OPCW to be eroded as our inspectorate shrinks.
- We need to strengthen the links in our global implementation chain by growing capacity among all States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention.
- We also need to think imaginatively about how we address chemical terrorism, especially where there are shortfalls in current global non-proliferation norms.
- And we need to be able to mobilise resources and solicit in-kind contributions for special and contingency operations, as we did with the mission to destroy Syria's chemical weapons programme.

Over the past year, since we first addressed the issue of capacity-building at this forum, the OPCW has further developed its approach to all four of these issues.

Let me expand a little on each of them here before concluding my remarks.

On **technical capability**, as our inspectors and analysts complete their seven-year tenure or retire, it is imperative that we have in place a mechanism for retaining their expertise.

To this end, we have sought to re-hire inspectors as we build up a knowledge management process that draws on resources within, and beyond, the organisation.

On **universality and implementation**, with the addition of two new Member States over recent months - Myanmar and Angola - we have expanded our reach.

And we have redoubled our efforts to persuade Egypt, Israel, North Korea and South Sudan to reconsider their relationship to what is now a longstanding and nearly universal global norm.

But we remain only too aware of the fact that universality must be qualitative as well as quantitative.

More than 50 of our States Parties, for example, still do not have implementing legislation in place, not to speak of effective enforcement capacity.

The Convention must be a treaty in deed as well as word, and it is through more targeted outreach and assistance activities that we are seeking to tighten the non-proliferation regime.

On the **non-state actor threat**, the OPCW's Open-Ended Working Group on Terrorism has met three times this year, and earlier this month established a sub-working group to develop recommendations on how the Organisation could further contribute to global anti-terrorism efforts.

To stimulate discussion, the Technical Secretariat has issued papers on the legal accountability of non-State actors under the CWC, and on measures for preventing, and ensuring effective responses, to the hostile use of toxic chemicals.

At the same time, the OPCW continues to cooperate with the UN Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force through its Working Group on Preventing and Responding to WMD Attacks.

Earlier this year, this working group, which the OPCW co-chairs with the International Atomic Energy Agency, began a project on inter-agency interoperability and external communication in the event of a chemical and/or biological weapons attack.

And, on **resources for contingency operations**, as I have mentioned, we are making arrangements to support the work of the Joint Investigative Mechanism in Syria.

We are also discussing options for financing ongoing activities in Syria with our States Parties so that such activities do not affect the regular budget in what is, and will likely remain, a tight fiscal environment.

Mr Chairman,

What all of these four issues point to is the imperative to maintain the effectiveness of the OPCW's verification regime.

This regime will remain a standard-bearer for disarmament efforts further afield.

We need to grow it, and we need to do so in a way that is pruned to deliver the capacity we need for the problems we are facing, now and in the future.

These problems will increasingly relate to the much more complex, much less visible task of preventing chemical weapons from re-emerging.

Their solutions will need to factor in advances in science, technology and communications that are occurring all too rapidly.

And they will need to address actors that do not recognise international humanitarian norms and law.

All of our capacity-building efforts aimed at curbing and eliminating weapons of mass destruction must be designed and undertaken with this in mind.

This concludes my remarks today, and I thank you for your attention.