



ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

First Meeting of the OPCW Advisory Board on Education and Outreach

Remarks by Director-General Ahmet Üzümcü

OPCW Headquarters, The Hague, the Netherlands

28 April 2016

REMARKS AS DELIVERED

Distinguished members of the Advisory Board,

Distinguished observers,

Dear colleagues,

I am pleased to address the inaugural meeting of the OPCW's Advisory Board on Education and Outreach.

Establishment of such a board represents a new step in the evolution of the OPCW.

Many among you have made significant contributions to the work of the OPCW, and for the newcomers among us, we hope that you will support our work well into the future. The objective of this newly established body – to connect people to the work of the OPCW, and further give them a role in its success – is vitally important. For this work will significantly contribute to the OPCW's future success.

The creation of an Advisory Board is not a routine occurrence for this Organisation. The last time it happened was in 1997 when SAB was established, shortly after the Chemical Weapons Convention entered into force. One of the central recommendations of the SAB's Temporary Working Group on Education and Outreach was the creation of an expert advisory group to support this work.

I am pleased that this proposal has been actualized, as evidenced by your presence here today, and further so by the recommendations you will develop.

Nearly twenty years later, the creation of this new body signifies not only the growing importance of education and outreach to the OPCW, but also speaks to the changing nature of our work.

Before we commence this inaugural meeting, I would like to outline where I see the Board playing a crucial role in the OPCW work.

For starters, the OPCW, and the treaty that it is charged with implementing, are often regarded as exemplars in the disarmament and non-proliferation arena. With 192 States Parties, the Convention is the most widely adhered to disarmament treaty in the world.

The Convention stands apart as the first – and only – treaty to verifiably ban an entire class of weapons of mass destruction. As a result, the OPCW has overseen the global destruction of tens of thousands of tonnes of chemical warfare agents. Today, 92% of declared stockpiles of chemical warfare agent have been destroyed, along with most of the infrastructure required for their production. Within a few years, we expect that elimination of the remaining declared stockpiles, the majority of which lie in the Russian Federation and the United States, will be completed.

Our work to eliminate Syria's chemical weapons programme has not only affirmed the effectiveness of the Convention, but also speaks to the treaty's relevance amid today's security challenges.

The removal and destruction of a large chemical arsenal in the midst of an active conflict, involving significant technical, political and security challenges, was a singular achievement that raised the OPCW's profile more than any other event in its history. The Syria mission opened our regime to new ways of working, and fostered new partnerships. Though not yet complete, the Syria mission set a new operational paradigm that will serve us well in the future.

The OPCW administers one of the most intrusive treaty verification regimes ever created. This unique system lends our States Parties the trust and confidence needed to credibly verify global chemical disarmament, and it does so in a spirit of openness and transparency that belies the system's technical complexity. Our inspectors carry out their demanding task away from the limelight, but for many in the chemical industry – one of our most important partners – they are the face of our Organisation.

In 2013, in recognition of the Organisation's achievements, the OPCW was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. After years of working quietly behind the scenes, we were humbled by such an acknowledgment. But since winning the Nobel, I have reminded our staff that our hardest work lies ahead of us, and we must prepare for any risk that confronts our regime.

Today, the global ban on chemical weapons is facing new and, in many cases, unforeseen challenges. We are all aware of threat posed by the ongoing use of chemical weapons in Syria and Iraq. This continuing use of chemical weapons is of grave concern, not only for those who have been exposed to such barbarous weapons, but also for the international norm enshrined by the Convention. Further still, the modern day use of such weapons has also attracted international attention to the growing issue of chemical terrorism.

The Convention, though not specifically designed to deal with chemical terrorism, nonetheless has an active role to play in the prevention and response to such acts. Meeting and responding to this rising threat will require flexibility, new thinking, and engagement of new stakeholders.

But chemical terrorism is not the only challenge we face. Advances in science and technology, with their resultant effect on economic growth and development, have the power to deliver millions from poverty. Yet such advances, when misused, also have the potential to undermine the success of the CWC and similar regimes. The convergence of biology and chemistry, increasing economic integration, the development of the global chemical industry, and innovations in information technology are just a few examples of areas where we are – and will continue to be – tested.

We are fortunate that the Convention was negotiated with the involvement of the scientific community and the chemical industry, and its enduring success owes much to their continuing involvement. Through your work with the OPCW, whether through the Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) or other engagements, many of you have alerted us to developments that could challenge implementation of the Convention – as well as highlighting advancements that could enhance it.

For its part, the SAB was judicious in recognising that realising the OPCW's overarching goal – a world free of chemical weapons – will not come about simply through State-level compliance measures and the engagement of a small group of scientists.

Preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons will require something more: deeper engagement with our core community of stakeholders, and the broadening of our networks beyond this community.

Prevention of re-emergence will also require this Organisation to articulate in new ways the values that brought the Chemical Weapons Convention into existence – responsible science for the benefit of humanity, a culture of peace, and steadfast commitment to effective multilateral solutions.

Prevention of re-emergence will compel us to develop new tools for engagement and new avenues for outreach, and to further generate a sense of ownership among the next generation of scientists, lawyers, and decision makers.

For the reasons I have just mentioned, this Board will play a crucial role in orienting the OPCW to meet its future challenges. Your Terms of Reference refer to the provision of both strategic and practical advice, to the monitoring of global developments on education and outreach, and to the development of a portfolio of practical activities and projects.

For your part, you will be working closely with the Technical Secretariat, as well as with States Parties that may request your advice.

As you start your work, you may want to get a sense of the Organisation and its priorities, and to meet those in the Secretariat who will be working with you. You may also want to start thinking about how you can contribute, both individually and collectively, to the OPCW's education and outreach efforts.

Part of this will involve the strategic side of this endeavour. For this, I encourage you to work with Secretariat staff to develop an overarching strategy for OPCW education and outreach that will guide our work in the future. I expect such strategy should lead to a more concerted approach, and one that is more deeply and visibly connected to the achievement of the OPCW's mission.

Equally, on the more practical side, there are four initiatives where I hope to count on your contributions.

As you may know, the OPCW is organising a series of regional education and outreach events for our States Parties. Your involvement in these events will contribute significantly to their success. I invite you to help us to devise ways that we may implement the recommendations generated at these meetings.

A second initiative calls for the creation of an OPCW Visitor Centre and Permanent Exhibition. The Centre – to be housed on the OPCW's grounds – will create a unique opportunity to engage our immediate community and visitors from around the world. It is an opportunity to tell our story in an attractive, interactive and compelling way. I look forward to your input on the broader role it can play.

Third, and as part of our broader public diplomacy strategy, the redesign of the OPCW website and the reboot of our social media strategy is another area where I hope you will act as a sounding board. Your input and feedback will be highly valued as we create a coherent and interactive digital media strategy.

Finally, next year's celebration of the OPCW's 20th anniversary will be the centrepiece among many of the Organisation's activities in 2017, and will present a great opportunity to brand our mission as we chart our future. We are now in the planning stages of a number of events to mark the occasion, including a large-scale event in April next year. Again, we will be looking to this Board to help us seize the opportunity the anniversary presents to broaden our reach.

This is a full agenda, but it is appropriate for a time of unique challenges and opportunities. At the heart of your work will be a simple idea: that we must build and sustain a connection with those who contribute to the Organisation's success, wherever they are and whoever they may be.

And because our work – and the context in which we work – is changing, they will not necessarily be the same people as those that have contributed to our past achievements. They will be a broader, more diverse group. They will in many cases be younger. Our challenge will be to inspire them, to challenge them, and, ultimately, to motivate them to act.

You have an important task before you. I wish you every success in your meeting and look forward to seeing the results of your work.

Thank you.