

Global Summit on Chemical Safety and Security (CHEMSS 2016)

**Hamid Ali Rao, Deputy Director-General, OPCW
Kielce, Poland, 18 April 2016**

Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am very pleased to be with you here for this important event.

At the outset, I want to thank the Organizers and the Government of Poland for inviting the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

The OPCW is the implementing body of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) - a landmark treaty that obligates countries to uphold a ban on the production, use, storage and transfer of chemical weapons.

As custodian of the Convention, our Organisation has overseen the elimination of thousands of tonnes of chemical weapons across the globe during the last 19 years.

Nearly 92% of the world's declared stockpile of 70,500 metric tonnes of chemical weapons has now been destroyed – largely in Russia and the United States – and the remaining stockpiles are due to be eliminated within the next seven years.

Five countries that had declared possession of chemical weapons stockpiles have already completed destruction, verified by OPCW inspectors.

This includes the recent elimination of the declared Syrian chemical weapons.

Shortly after the Organisation received the Nobel Peace Prize, we were able to prove just how effective the global chemical disarmament regime can be – and how relevant it remains.

Amidst the brutal conflict in Syria, a large chemical arsenal was removed and destroyed less than one year after Syria's decision to join the Chemical Weapons Convention in September 2013.

This comprised more than 1,000 tonnes of sulfur mustard and precursor chemicals used for the production of deadly nerve agents, such as sarin.

Yet, as impressive as these achievements are, they do not represent the full extent of the work of the OPCW.

For disarmament is about more than getting rid of weapons – it is about making sure they are not re-emerged.

And, in the case of chemical weapons, it is about making sure any chemicals – including freely traded industrial ones – are not used as weapons; preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons remains our important task.

It is a task that we must now also undertake amid the new reality of chemical terrorism.

Enhancing the safety and security of chemicals is, of course, fundamental to such efforts.

This is why they are part and parcel of the OPCW's holistic approach to achieve a world free of chemical weapons.

To ensure that chemical industry across the globe is engaged in exclusively peaceful activities, the OPCW has conducted inspections at more than 3,000 facilities in over eighty countries – and continues to do so.

We work with our Member States to monitor transfers of potentially dangerous dual-use chemicals, to help ensure transparency about their use.

We also conduct training and assistance activities to ensure full and effective implementation of the Convention across the globe, with a special focus on where needs are greatest.

These activities range widely – from assistance and protection against chemical attacks or incidents, to promoting cooperation in analytical chemistry, laboratory management and other technical spheres.

Through our international cooperation efforts, we use our global platform to advance issues ranging from safety of chemical processes to chemical risk and hazardous waste management.

By promoting a common approach to safety and security, we aim to reduce the incidence of chemical accidents within industry.

And based on the requirements of our Member States, we provide assistance for developing risk assessment and mitigation measures for chemical safety and security.

Since 2009, we have trained more than 1,000 experts globally, who come from 130 of our Member States.

These trainings have been provided to safety officers, researchers, policy-makers and legal officers who deal with chemical safety and security concerns. They have been designed to benefit the small and medium enterprises, which may lack certain safety and security practices while dealing with schedule chemicals.

And our work continues.

For example, one of the projects that are under consideration is developing and sharing expertise for evaluating – to common standards – chemical security infrastructure.

Given that nearly all the world's countries are members of our organisation, we have a unique advantage in promoting efforts in this area.

Rapid globalization of the chemical industry over recent years has only increased the urgency for more effective measures.

For there is one thing that chemical industry – whether multinationals, or small to medium-sized enterprises – shares in common worldwide --- **Chemical safety and security is good for business.**

We have seen the enormous human and environmental costs that previous chemical accidents can have.

But imagine such costs multiplied by the purposeful actions of terrorist groups.

Preventing this sort of contingency – raising the bar against accidents as well as terrorist attacks – is a responsibility shared by governments and industry.

A key message of this summit will be that, working together, we can make meaningful and effective investments in sustainable security practices.

And we must build a proactive culture of safety and security – one that becomes second nature in our regulatory and business practice.

Practice that we need to view as a bottom-line investment for the future of the industry, both in commercial and ethical terms.

For chemistry will remain a key to our prosperity for many years to come – prosperity which we cannot afford to jeopardise through inattention to our safety and security.

Ladies and gentlemen,

For the OPCW, destruction of existing stocks of chemical weapons is by no means the final chapter of our mission.

Our goal is to see chemistry is always used exclusively for peaceful purposes, as enshrined in the Chemical Weapons Convention.

This will require engagement with a broadening community of partners, foremost among which will be industry.

For defending against the misuse of chemicals relies on a high degree of awareness, a shared vision, and a shared sense of responsibility.

Business leaders, scientists, chemists and chemical engineers worldwide are not only the first line of defence – they are a community that sets professional and ethical standards.

It is meetings such as this one, and the networks that they spawn, that serve to ensure that such standards are always best practice.

The OPCW stands ready to develop partnerships to this end – to prevent both mishap and misuse, and to maximise the benefits that chemistry brings to all of us in a world free of chemical weapons.

Thank you.