



**ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS**  
**NATO Conference on WMD Arms Control, Disarmament, and Non-Proliferation**

**Keynote Speech by Director-General Ahmet Üzümcü**

**Ljubljana, Slovenia**

**9 May 2016**

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*REMARKS AS DELIVERED*

H.E. Ms Darja Bavdaž Kuret, State Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs;

H.E. Ambassador Alexander Vershbow, Deputy Secretary General of NATO;

H.E. Mr Kim Won-soo, Under Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs of the United Nations;

Excellencies,

Distinguished participants,

Dear friends,

At the outset, I wish to recognise the organisers of this event for the invitation to address you here in Slovenia. My work has now brought me to this beautiful country twice within a year, and it is a great pleasure to be back in Ljubljana.

Throughout my tenure as Director-General, I have been grateful for the opportunity to speak at this particular conference, a forum that is known for its focus on concrete approaches to some of the more pressing concerns we face today.

In line with our joint focus to address threats of non-proliferation, the OPCW and NATO have enjoyed a productive level of cooperation for many years.

Current security challenges render such cooperation schemes even more important.

We at the OPCW stand at a critical juncture in our organisation's relatively short history. At the nearly twenty year mark, our global prohibition regime stands at a pivot point between tangible disarmament achievements, with the destruction of 92% of existing stockpiles, and the demanding task of making such gains permanent.

It is increasingly clear that our future ahead is rife with challenges. As we consider the use of chemical weapons in the contemporary global security environment, gone are the days when States can deter such attacks through threat of military action.

Put simply, the mere concept of the battlefield has changed dramatically.

Given the near effortlessness of modern transportation, the speed at which communication travels, and the galloping pace of technological innovation, today's security planners operate in an environment that is equal parts inspiring – and daunting.

Consider the current instability in the Middle East and North Africa region. The effects of the civil conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic have reverberated not only throughout the region, but have extended to Europe and beyond. Whether we consider the exodus of millions of Syrian refugees or the transnational implications of terror networks, it is clear that a single conflict can have a ripple effect half a world away.

We at the OPCW are grappling with how best to prepare for and respond to such ripple effects, and indeed, our experience in the past few years has equipped us with new tools for the future to come.

Let me touch upon some of these more high-profile events, detail how we responded to them, and later offer some thoughts on what we have learned as a result.

As we take stock of these recent experiences, it becomes clear that our work in Syria challenged us – and continues to challenge us – unlike any other chapter in our organisation's history. Today we can say that all of Syria's declared chemical weapons – comprising a sizeable chemical arsenal – have been excised from Syrian territory and destroyed abroad. The intricate removal and destruction process required the support of no less than 30 OPCW Member States, many of which are represented in this room, and this project highlighted the importance of international cooperation to our collective disarmament efforts.

Put simply, the Syria mission set a new operational paradigm for our work that had never before been envisaged.

We were thrust into several new activities that have not only stretched the limits of our organisation and the Convention we implement, but it also provided us with new and novel approaches that can be applied elsewhere in the future.

In addition to the removal and elimination of Syria's declared chemical arsenal, the OPCW has dispatched Fact-Finding Missions to Syria. These missions, comprised of technical experts, gather on-the-ground information regarding allegations of the use of toxic chemicals as weapons in Syria. And they have surfaced results that are both tangible and valuable.

The Fact-Finding Missions, which have attracted the widespread approval of the UN Security Council and OPCW Executive Council, have concluded, with a high degree of confidence, that chlorine and later, sulphur mustard have been used against Syrian civilians. Further, they have found that there is a high likelihood that lives have been lost as a result of such attacks. This important work carries on, as the mission continues to gather more data stemming from recent allegations of chemical weapons use.

The Fact-Finding Missions have also contributed directly to efforts to assign responsibility for the use of chemical weapons in Syria. In August of last year, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2235, calling for the establishment of an OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism, or JIM.

The JIM's task is essential to our work. Its mission is to identify the governments, individuals or groups that have carried out, or sponsored, attacks using chlorine or other toxic chemicals in the Syrian Arab Republic. Adoption of this resolution represented a crucial moment for the international community's resolve to pursue allegations of non-compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention, and it exemplifies the exceptional role that international organisations can play in this regard. This Mechanism is carrying forward its work this year, and is expected to soon issue its second report on progress it has made under its mandate.

Finally, and for more than two years, the OPCW has been working diligently with Syria to address the gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies regarding its initial declaration.

As required by the Convention, this declaration must detail the name of each chemical in its stockpile, the type of delivery mechanisms for all chemical agents, the locations of all relevant facilities, and information on any research and development activities. Shortly after joining the Convention, Syria submitted its initial declaration, and for more than two years, the OPCW has sought to assist Syria to declare all aspects of its programme. Through our Declaration Assessment Team, or DAT, the OPCW has made some progress in this area.

However, there still remain some issues, which we are working to resolve with the Syrian government.

As a sign of the importance that it attaches to this issue, the OPCW Executive Council recently requested that I engage directly with the Syrian Arab Republic on these issues, and we have recently begun consultations on the matter. I will report on the progress we have made before the next session of the Council in July.

In addition to the large task to remove and destroy Syria's declared stocks, these new and novel approaches – including Fact-Finding Missions, the Declaration Assessment Team, and the Joint Investigative Mechanism – have set a new operational paradigm in which the OPCW is now working.

And some of these new practices extend beyond our experience in Syria.

In the wake of allegations of the use of sulphur mustard in Iraq, the Iraqi government opened an investigation into an incident that occurred in the north of the country in August of last year. As part of its investigation, Iraq requested our support to provide technical assistance to its inquiry. The OPCW quickly responded to this request, and I deployed a team to the area where the chemical attack took place. Following its work in Iraq, and drawing from analysis of environmental samples and biomedical samples from victims, the OPCW team supported the Iraqi government conclusion that sulphur mustard had been used, probably by Daesh.

The Iraq exercise demonstrated once again that the OPCW has the capacity to deploy rapidly, collect data, and report on its findings through careful – and independent – sampling and analysis.

I will return to this example later in my remarks.

Beyond Syria and Iraq, we are also closely monitoring the evolving security situation in Libya, where there is growing unease about the Category 2 chemical weapons that remain in that country. In light of these concerns, there is an intensifying effort among the Technical Secretariat, Libya and other States Parties to accelerate the elimination of these chemical stocks, in order to prevent any proliferation risk.

To set some context, Libyan authorities contacted the OPCW earlier this year to inform that, due to several factors, Libya would be unable to meet the deadline for destruction of its remaining Category 2 chemicals. Citing its lack of technical capacity, concerns about its deteriorating security situation, and worries about environmental safety, Libya requested the OPCW to work with States Parties to seek solutions for the elimination of its remaining chemical agent.

A special meeting of the Council was convened to discuss the destruction of Libya's remaining chemical weapons stockpile. The Council, noting its concern for the prevailing security situation in Libya, particularly the threat of non-state actors, called on the OPCW Secretariat to work with relevant States Parties to identify options to destroy Libya's stockpile.

In response to the Council's decision, we are looking at all options for destruction, while carefully examining the legal, technical, financial and operational parameters for such an operation.

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These recent real-world events highlight one simple fact: the past months and years have been far from business as usual at the OPCW.

Yet across these unique cases, it is clear that the Convention has proven its flexibility in the face of such unique challenges.

It is equally clear that, as a result of these trials, the OPCW has broadened its operational portfolio well beyond verification of destruction of chemical warfare agents and munitions.

This new scope of activity has clear implications for the next phase of our work, as we endeavour to counter the threat of non-state actors from developing – and using – chemical weapons.

To prepare for and meet these highly complex challenges, we are surging our efforts in several key areas.

First, by developing deeper partnerships, we are working to enhance dialogue and cooperation to meet the challenge of chemical terrorism.

First and foremost, as the global headquarters for the prohibition of chemical weapons, we are taking advantage of the OPCW's unique position to convene global discourse on chemical terrorism. In this regard, we are increasing dialogue and fostering cooperation with States Parties on this mounting challenge.

Recently, our long-standing Working Group on Terrorism has been heavily engaged with States Parties on the terror threat, particularly so on measures to prevent chemical terrorism, preparing effective responses to an incident or attack, and crucially for the Convention, itemising the legal aspects that allow for prosecution of any chemical terrorist acts.

This last point is particularly crucial, for the Convention stipulates that States must limit any permissive environments where non-state actors might operate.

In addition to the important work of our Working Group on Terrorism, the Secretariat works closely with States on this issue.

These efforts focus on ensuring that all OPCW Member States have robust domestic laws in place to criminalise any activities that are prohibited under the Convention.

Capacity building is also a major focus of this work. We work closely with States Parties to make sure they are equipped to manage any crisis involving toxic substances, from mitigation and preparedness to response and recovery. We are active in promoting robust chemical safety and security practices at every step of the lifecycle of toxic chemicals.

And later this year, in a promising new chapter for our cooperation with NATO, our experts will jointly offer training for a CBRN first responders course at the Centre of Excellence at Vyskov, in the Czech Republic. Through this collaboration, trainees from Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, and Tunisia will be trained on response to a CBRN event, which will involve the use of live agent.

As our States Parties continue to seek opportunities for training and sharing of best practices, we welcome future cooperation with NATO and other organisations in this area.

Also, our unique scientific and technical expertise adds value in chemical counter-terrorism efforts. With more than twenty best-in-class designated laboratories arrayed in our global network, the OPCW offers an unrivalled capacity to analyse the possible indications of a chemical weapons attack. If a State Party's investigation would require independent verification or confirmation of results, the OPCW can offer unbiased technical support for such an effort.

Our recent work in Iraq, which I referenced earlier in my remarks, is evidence of this unique capacity.

And we are moving beyond mere analysis of samples drawn from chemical weapons or their precursors.

Our analytical capability is extending into biomedical examinations, so we can investigate the indications of human exposure to chemical weapons.

These capabilities have proven their value in our recent work in both Syria and Iraq.

But we have gone a step further in this regard.

Given the need to respond quickly to any incident involving the hostile use of toxic chemicals, we are enhancing our capacity to deploy on short notice in the wake of a chemical attack.

As an outcome of discussions among States Parties through the Working Group on Terrorism, the Secretariat has proposed that a Rapid Response Assistance Team be set up to deal with such incidents.

The concept is simple yet effective.

In essence, upon request of a State Party, the OPCW would quickly dispatch a team to respond to an incident involving the alleged use of chemical weapons by non-state actors. The team's capacity would be tailored to the specific situation. Clearly, its experts would be equipped with analytical equipment to detect and characterise any toxic chemicals, and also collect samples for off-site analysis. If a State required advice on decontamination or treatment of victims, the OPCW would deploy relevant experts for managing such issues. The team could also provide advice on how to secure an area for forensic examination, or isolation of forensic evidence. And finally, the team would be equipped to facilitate cooperation and coordination with the UN and other relevant international organisations.

Providing such emergency measures of assistance is one more way that the OPCW is adapting its approach to deal with the ongoing threat of chemical terrorism.

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Excellencies,

Dear colleagues,

From our headquarters in the Netherlands to the front lines of conflicts involving chemical weapons, the OPCW is drawing together its capabilities to become the world's premier chemical security organisation.

When we face the future threat of chemical terrorism, it is clear that no other organisation can draw on such broad and global political support. This support is perhaps best exemplified by our nearly universal membership, comprised of 192 States Parties. We hope that the few remaining countries will soon join the international norm against chemical weapons.

It is clear, too, that no other organisation brings with it such extensive scientific expertise.

And with nearly twenty years of practical experience in the field, no other organisation has such an accomplished track record in chemical disarmament and non-proliferation.

But as experience has shown, we cannot shoulder this burden alone.

As we author the next chapter in chemical disarmament, we are redoubling our efforts to reach out to new audiences who can help us to shape our common future.

To assist us in this important area, we recently established an Advisory Board on Outreach and Education. This new body, comprised of fifteen prominent experts from OPCW Member States, will offer us practical advice and proposals on education and outreach strategies, and further develop a range of activities aligned with global trends. Following its inaugural session last month, we have great expectations that this expert group will help us to broaden our reach to newer, and younger, audiences.

Last week, in one of our largest outreach events to date, we marked the 19th anniversary of the founding of the OPCW with a three-day conference and exhibition at our headquarters in The Hague. With a focus on chemical safety and security, one of the key takeaways from the conference was that security is no longer the sole prerogative of governments.

All of us – from policy-makers to scientists, industry representatives to civil society – we all have a role to play in preventing chemical weapons from re-emerging.

Through tangible partnerships and robust participation from our many stakeholders, we are broadening and expanding our networks to work towards this primary goal. And it is clear that good working relationships with organisations such as NATO are essential to work towards a future without chemical weapons.

In addition to NATO, our partnership efforts with two other international bodies are worth noting. We are willing to deepen our long-standing partnership with the UN 1540 Committee. Our work with 1540 seeks to take advantage of our synergistic mandates, particularly by supporting States Parties that request assistance for national implementation of the Convention. Later this week in Spain, my Deputy will participate in a Comprehensive Review for the implementation of resolution 1540, along with a host of other international organisations and bodies.

We are also engaging with major international organisations through the UN Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF), a body which forms part of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. An important aspect of the CTITF's work involves supporting Member States to enhance preparedness and response capacities through a common and coherent framework. As Co-Chair of a Working Group on Preventing and Responding to WMD Attacks, the OPCW has called for enhanced interagency coordination in response to a chemical terrorist attack.

With the involvement of nearly twenty organisations, such a mechanism could prove to be a promising new vehicle to coordinate international response in the event of future chemical weapons use.

Across all these initiatives, though our mandates and membership may differ, we must advance in a common direction if we are to build on our hard-fought achievements in chemical disarmament. As we rise to meet these new threats to our common security, let us continue to work together, to share best practices, and to innovate new solutions to meet these challenges.

I wish you a successful conference ahead.

Thank you.