

Remarks to Seminar on Chemical Trade:

Current Practices and Challenges

Rizhao City, Shandong Province, China

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16 June 2016

Mr. LI Yang, Deputy Director-General of the Arms Control Department,

Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

At the outset, I wish to thank the Chinese government for co-organising this important seminar on “Chemical Trade: Current Practices and Challenges”.

This event provides a timely opportunity to share information, experiences and best practices in relation to trade and export control.

All of you bring valuable experience to bear on how effective your country’s legislation and regulatory frameworks are in preventing chemicals and technologies from being diverted to those who would misuse them.

This experience should inform the sort of benchmarks we need to set – in part, by identifying where there may be gaps, and looking into what more can be done to fill them through cooperative activities and programmes.

The OPCW works closely with its Member States to do just that.

But before I get onto this, I would like to touch upon the core mission of the OPCW.

Our overarching aim is to achieve a world free of chemical weapons.

To do this, we work to verify the elimination of chemical weapons across the globe – and, crucially, to prevent their re-emergence.

Yet, as critical as these tasks are, this is not all that we do.

The OPCW also provides wide-ranging support to its Member States to promote peaceful uses of chemistry – uses that enhance not only our security, but also our welfare and prosperity.

In undertaking these tasks, the OPCW is guided by its mandate to oversee the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Founded on science, and informed by industrial practice, the Convention is one of the most successful disarmament treaties ever negotiated.

192 countries are now members of the OPCW.

Never before have so many countries stood united to bring an end to an entire class of weapons of mass destruction.

In less than two decades, we have made extraordinary progress in bringing an end to chemical weapons.

To date, 92% of all declared stockpiles of chemical weapons have been destroyed.

Yet, as recent events have demonstrated, our work is not complete.

Amid the horrors of the Syrian conflict, and security concerns in neighboring Iraq, chemical weapons continue to be used, including against innocent civilians.

And, for the first time in two decades, non-state actors have used – and possibly even made – such deadly weapons.

None of us are immune from the threat posed by chemical terrorism.

The destructive imagination of terrorists knows no bounds, and we must be vigilant to ensure that weapons of mass destruction – including chemical weapons – remain beyond their reach at all times.

Which is why we need to be imaginative in devising ways of preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons.

A big part of this is preventing dangerous materials and technologies from falling into the wrong hands, which is why enhancing trade controls is so important.

You represent a broad range of professions related to chemical trade – from customs officials to industry representatives, from regulatory authorities to commercial associations.

As such, you have an important stake in reducing the threat of chemical weapons being rebuilt or acquired.

Controlling what is being traded does not mean restricting trade flows – quite the contrary.

For secure trade aligns closely with commercial interests.

Put simply: allowing dangerous chemicals to pass into the wrong hands is not good for business.

To prevent this, we must enact laws and policies that facilitate secure trade in chemicals, and ensure that they are being put into practice.

From our side, the OPCW actively supports efforts to streamline ways of maintaining trade flows in chemicals, without hampering legitimate trade.

This includes collaborating on training efforts with those actively involved in safe and secure transfers of nuclear and other hazardous materials, especially customs officials and border authorities.

Sharing best practices – as we intend to do here at this event – is a vital tool for improving our expertise and professionalising our efforts.

Our 192 Member States Parties have a crucial role to play here as well, especially in a region as dynamic as Asia.

But, whatever the region, one thing is clear: no country is now unaffected by an increasingly globalised world in which growing economic interdependence is the new reality.

It is in these circumstances that the OPCW is seeking to broaden its community of stakeholders, and to widen its impact.

Against the backdrop of remarkable growth in the global chemical industry, ensuring chemicals are never traded – whether knowingly or not – for purposes banned under the Chemical Weapons Convention must be a high priority.

The growth in knowledge-based economies across Asia, including in the chemical sector, means that this region stands to play a vital role in this process.

In order to build a future where there are no chemical weapons, we will count on your active support – whether you work in industry, in research, logistics or government.

To maximise the potential benefits of the peaceful use of chemicals, we need to build more proactive partnerships across all these areas, across the globe.

For we can only be as strong as our weakest link in increasingly global supply chains.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Trade has long been the lifeblood of our economies.

And trade in chemicals is increasingly becoming the lifeblood of our societies – to make more of us healthier, more prosperous and always, more secure.

Let us work together to ensure this remains so.

I wish you a successful meeting.

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