The OPCW's Mission and Role for International Peace and Prosperity
Address to Students at Hankuk University

Ahmet Üzümcü, Director-General of the OPCW
Seoul, 8 September 2016

Prof. Hwang,
Faculty members,
Dear students,

I am delighted to have this opportunity to speak at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies.

In just over six decades, your institution has established itself as a premier centre of learning both in Korea and internationally. It has trained leaders in industry and government. Your alumni have opened up the Republic of Korea to the world and made major contributions to the peace and prosperity of your country.

In preparing for my visit, I was struck by your University's motto, "truth, peace and creation." It is one that also rings true for the mission we are engaged in at the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, or OPCW.

Our role is to oversee implementation of what is arguably the most successful disarmament treaty in history – the Chemical Weapons Convention. To fulfil this vital mission, we work with our 192 Member States to eliminate all existing chemical weapons, and to prevent new ones from being built. And we seek to reinforce the significant gains we have made in chemical disarmament by promoting cooperation on peaceful uses of chemistry across the globe.

In doing so, we make a vital contribution to global peace and security – a contribution that was recognised by the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to the OPCW in 2013.

But our ongoing success in a rapidly shifting strategic environment will require a more comprehensive approach to chemical security into the future. This means, first and foremost, engaging, and drawing on the expertise of, a broader range of stakeholders and partners. For this reason, I especially welcome the opportunity to speak to you as future leaders of your country in diplomacy and industry. For it will be up to your generation not only to safeguard the security benefits we have achieved, but also to ensure that scientific knowledge always serve the cause of peace.

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As many of you may be aware, chemical weapons have left a brutal legacy over most of the twentieth century, claiming thousands of victims. They have been used in conflicts in many parts of the world, and even against civilian populations – most horrifically, in the village of Halabja in northern Iraq in 1988. Unlike conventional weapons, they kill or maim by their toxic properties – usually, by causing the suffocation of their victims. And, also unlike most conventional weapons, chemical weapons kill indiscriminately, since their dispersal cannot be controlled. Worth noting, in this regard, is that one drop of the deadly nerve agent sarin can kill an adult in a matter of seconds.

These facts led to a diplomatic push to comprehensively outlaw such weapons, beginning at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva in the early 1970s. But it was not until two decades later that these efforts bore fruit with the conclusion in 1992 of the Chemical Weapons Convention – and its entry into force in 1997. The comprehensive nature of the treaty that we were able to negotiate was well worth the wait.

Let me point you to three distinct features, which make the Chemical Weapons Convention truly unique – even now, a quarter of a century since it was concluded.

The first is that it is comprehensive in scope, banning under international law not only the use of chemical weapons, but also their development, production, stockpiling and transfer. In this way, the Convention goes well beyond the more limited provisions of two earlier attempts to ban chemical weapons – the 1899 Hague Convention and the 1925 Geneva Protocol.

The second feature is that it is non-discriminatory – no Member State is permitted to have chemical weapons, and those that do are obliged to destroy them.

The third feature is that the Convention is more than a legal norm – it is backed up with a verification regime to prove that Member States are holding to their commitments. This means that OPCW inspectors are deployed to verify destruction of chemical weapons, and to inspect industrial facilities to ensure they are engaged exclusively in peaceful purposes.

These features have combined in ways that have underwritten remarkable achievements in global chemical disarmament over the past two decades. As I mentioned earlier, 192 countries are now States Parties to the Convention – only four short of complete universality.

93% of all chemical weapons declared to the OPCW have now been destroyed, across 98% of the world's territory and population. This amounts to more than 65,000 metric tonnes of deadly chemical agent. And the destruction of remaining stocks, held by Russia and the United States, is scheduled to be completed by 2023 – only seven years away.

What this means is that we now stand at the threshold of an entire category of weapons of mass destruction being eliminated.

Underlining this success more recently has been the unprecedented international mission led by the OPCW to remove and destroy Syria's chemical weapons. The fact that this mission

was able to attract strong technical, financial and political support, as well as to achieve its objectives in such a short time, lays testimony to the strength of international consensus against chemical weapons. It also lays testimony to the strength of the legal norm that has underpinned our efforts for almost twenty years in the form of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

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Yet, notwithstanding this success, it is still too early to claim mission accomplished for global chemical disarmament. The OPCW faces a host of new and emerging challenges that will make our work increasingly complex over coming years. In particular, this relates to what we need to do to prevent chemical weapons from re-emerging in a rapidly changing strategic environment. Let me give you some examples.

First, at a time when the threat of states using chemical weapons has become distant, terrorist groups have made no secret of their ambitions to acquire, and to use, such weapons. This threat has already made itself felt as a grim reality over recent months at the hands of so-called Islamic State in the Middle East.

Secondly, several of our Member States still do not have in place laws for enforcing the Convention's prohibitions within their jurisdictions. Member States' ability to prosecute their nationals for crimes committed under the Convention is vital for the credibility and integrity of this global norm. Clearly, we cannot afford to have any weak links in what should be a global non-proliferation chain.

Thirdly, we still need to bring on board the four states that have not yet joined the Chemical Weapons Convention. You, more than most, will appreciate the importance of this, given the widely held suspicion that Pyongyang harbours a chemical weapons stockpile and production capability.

Fourthly and lastly, rapid advances in science and technology, in a globalising world, are having an impact on how we implement the Convention. Failing to keep abreast of these changes could risk undermining the gains we have made in preventing chemistry from being misused.

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What, then, is the OPCW doing to meet these challenges?

Recently, the OPCW has expanded discussions within the OPCW's Open-Ended Working Group on Terrorism to come up with ways of strengthening controls on the activities of non-state actors. These have focused on promoting best-practice implementation of the Convention's prohibitions at the national level. For it is up to our Member States to make and enforce laws criminalising any activity banned by the Convention, such as using or developing chemical weapons. The bottom line is that any natural or legal person committing such offences must be prosecuted – whether he acts in the name of a state or a non-state entity.

At the same time, the OPCW has stepped up its training and assistance activities across the globe. Their purpose, put simply, is to build our Member States' capability to fulfil their obligations under the Convention. For example, the OPCW has developed tools and workshops for helping legal drafters to prepare relevant legislation. We have also rolled out programmes to assist law enforcement and customs officials in identifying and monitoring the production and transfer of any chemicals that could be misused as weapons. And we have stepped up our training and assistance activities aimed at helping our Member States protect against chemical attacks. These range from advising first responders on medical treatment for those exposed to toxic chemicals, to exercises on collecting forensic samples and decontaminating an affected site.

The OPCW is also looking into developing a rapid response capability of its own, which could deploy at short notice wherever in the world a chemical attack may occur.

Another major area of assistance the OPCW is engaged in is directed at promoting technical cooperation on the peaceful uses of chemistry. This ranges from building analytical capabilities of laboratories in our Member States, to expanding the experience of chemistry professionals from countries with developing economies in the context of our highly successful Associate Programme.

The OPCW's laboratory plays an important role in this regard. In addition to its key analytical support for our verification activities, the laboratory hosts a range of training programmes in which analytical chemists from all of our Member States can participate. The idea behind all this is clear: the many beneficial aspects of chemistry – in agriculture, in human health and in consumer production – must be made available to all. And, in sponsoring these sorts of activities, we strengthen our bulwark against the misuse of chemistry.

Finally, to better understand how chemistry can be misused, the OPCW sources wide-ranging advice from international experts – principally, through its Scientific Advisory Board. The Board comprises well-known scientists from around the world, who provide independent advice to me on scientific issues impacting on implementation of the Convention. For example, the Board has over recent years produced reports on the convergence of chemistry and biology, and on ways of strengthening verification techniques. This sort of advice is crucial for understanding how advances in science and technology can not only challenge, but also enhance, the integrity of the OPCW's verification regime.

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I mentioned earlier the OPCW's activities in Syria. The mission to remove and destroy Syria's chemical weapons – for all its successes – was not the end of these activities. There have been persistent reports of chemical weapons use over the course of this mission and since it was completed.

To address these allegations, I established an OPCW Fact-Finding Mission in April 2014. Its reports, which substantiated the use of chlorine as a weapon, as well as sulfur mustard, were instrumental in focusing the attention of the UN Security Council. The Council subsequently adopted a resolution – in August last year – establishing the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative

Mechanism. This mechanism is mandated to identify the perpetrators of chemical weapon attacks in Syria and has submitted its third report on 24 August to the UNSC.

The other ongoing aspect of our work in relation to Syria is assisting Syrian authorities to resolve outstanding questions about what it declared to the OPCW. Several of our Member States have expressed concerns about the completeness of Syria's declaration. Our experts are working to identify what information Syria must provide before its declaration can be considered complete and accurate. This will be a vital confidence-building measure for reinforcing the remarkable achievements of the removal and destruction mission.

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As you can see from this wide range of activities, the OPCW has a very comprehensive approach to disarmament and non-proliferation. This goes to show just how multifaceted and complex an exercise it is to make our disarmament gains permanent.

Part of this is that we also recognise that, to meet the challenges of the future, we need to broaden our community of stakeholders – from scientists to civil society, from industry representatives to members of the general public. To help us devise strategies for doing this, we recently established an Advisory Board on Education and Outreach.

As part of our ongoing engagement with academia, we have also sought to develop programmes for nurturing a culture of responsible science in universities and schools. Its objective is to raise awareness among researchers and students of the broader strategic context of their work, and of their responsibility to protect it from being misused. And we have facilitated discussions by scientists from across the globe, who developed the Hague Guidelines – a code of ethics for chemistry professionals. These guidelines are intended to serve as a practical baseline for adoption by scientific and industry associations, and have attracted a favourable response in several quarters to date.

All this work underlines an important point: scientists and policy-makers have to understand each other better. In our increasingly complex, globalised world, it is vital that policy-makers understand the technical dimensions of issues affecting human security. At the same time, scientists need to achieve a broader understanding of the implications of their research. And, just as importantly, they need to be able to advise non-scientists in ways that can streamline decision-making on policy settings. Securing a two-way line of consultation between science and diplomats is vital for the best possible outcomes in disarmament.

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Much of the activity I have referred to so far is aimed at new and emerging threats. But there are still old threats that need to be dealt with. Getting the remaining four countries still outside the Convention to join – Egypt, Israel, North Korea and South Sudan – remains a high priority for the OPCW.

Chemical weapons are not a strategic option for any country, whatever its circumstances. The international community must work together to ensure that the Chemical Weapons Convention extends to every corner of our planet. Encouragingly, South Sudan is preparing

for accession to the Convention. While Egypt and Israel have attached conditions for joining, we have at least had a dialogue with these countries.

So far, however, we have not been successful in engaging North Korea. It is vital that we use all means at our disposal for bringing international pressure to bear on Pyongyang. In this regard, any agreement on North Korea's nuclear capability must extend to all weapons of mass destruction. Without this, the gains for regional and global security will be incomplete.

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Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear students,

Following graduation, many of you will go on to serve in a wide variety of professions. The message I would leave you with is this. Whether we are diplomats, scientists, lawyers or students, we all have a vital stake in a future free of chemical weapons – a future in which chemistry is also set to increasingly underwrite our prosperity and well-being.

To this end, it is in all of our interests that disarmament is a comprehensive and ongoing enterprise.

An enterprise that strives not only to rid the world of weapons of mass destruction, but also to make them inaccessible and unwanted.

An enterprise that supports science and technology always working in the service of peace and security.

And, above all, an enterprise to which we all actively contribute to.

Thank you for your attention.