



ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

The Oxford Union

Address by

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ADDRESS AS DELIVERED

Mr Nikolay Koshikov, President of the Oxford Union,
Distinguished Members of the Union,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
It gives me great pleasure to address you today.

I welcome your interest in the subject of arms control and disarmament as a factor for the promotion of international peace. I will attempt to describe the contribution that the global ban on chemical weapons has made to this endeavour. I will also talk about the challenges we face in making it endure, especially, in the face of competing priorities in the world.

How we think about a future without the chemical weapons threat is not unrelated to how we think about global security in general.

The aspiration for eliminating this particular threat of mass destruction is part of the larger hopes for a safer world and therefore linked to wider progress on disarmament and non-proliferation.

There is fortunately an international consensus on disarmament even as it remains subject to fluctuating political fortunes. It is important to recall how and why this consensus came about and what justifies its preservation through unremitting efforts.

Some seventy years ago, after the experience of two devastating wars and driven by the instinct for self-preservation, the international community established a new framework for the conduct of nations in the form of the United Nations.

The new system and the new rules were designed in the words of the UN Charter “to save

succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind". These are powerful words and expressed the longing of a world shattered by conflict.

It was the very first resolution of the United Nations General Assembly in 1946 that called for 'the elimination from national armaments of atomic weapons and all other major weapons adaptable to mass destruction.' This resolution captured the mood of the time against further warfare and bloodshed. It expressed the common will to constrain humanity from a path that could lead to its own ruin.

After the despair of global conflicts, an era of hope was inaugurated; a world in which nations large and small were to work together for common good and for peace, prosperity and justice; where wasteful military expenditures were avoided save on the essential needs for justified self-defence.

For decades thereafter, the Cold War seriously hampered the realisation of this vision and kept the world on the brink. The fall of the Berlin Wall revived this promise as well as of a peace dividend. Notions of liberty, freedom and of private initiative as a vehicle for economic development once again took hold of our imagination.

We might be witnessing yet another epochal shift driven by relentless developments in fields such as science, technology and business. At the same time, changing demographics and, social and economic dynamics are impacting politics in ways unforeseen.

While it is difficult to fully apprehend the contours of the emerging era, what we know for certain is that our world has become a much smaller place. Today everyone is everyone else's neighbour. This brings unprecedented opportunities for cooperation. But it can also create competing perceptions of impending threats.

Despite the strains on the global system of governance and its evident vulnerabilities brought about by continuing regional conflicts and resurgent rivalries, the fundamental architecture for security still remains intact and relevant.

We possess the tools and familiarity with attitudes for dealing with global challenges in a collective and cooperative manner.

Human and societal progression will continue. What is important is to mediate progress by applying the norms and values that have taken a long time and a considerable effort to embed in the collective conscience.

Returning more directly to our subject, a distinct feature of the contemporary global order is a series of international agreements and treaties that address threats posed by weapons of mass destruction.

Of these, the most comprehensive and carefully crafted is the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). The Convention and its implementing body; the Organisation for the Prohibition of

Chemical Weapons (the OPCW) have now been in operation for two decades. The OPCW is an autonomous Organisation which has a special relationship with the UN.

29 April 2017 will mark the 20th anniversary of the OPCW's establishment. It offers an appropriate occasion to review our progress towards defined goals and to assess what the future might hold.

Behind every major and decisive international landmark lies a history of struggles or adversity. The CWC emerged as the response to a tragic history of chemical warfare.

The saying that 'those who forget their past are condemned to relive it' might be overused but remains abidingly true.

To bring perspective to the importance of the Convention and our objective of keeping it strong and relevant, it might be useful to briefly recount that sobering history.

The use of chemical weapons has long been regarded as contrary to the norms of customary international law. Poison gas, as these weapons were once called, spreads insidiously. It destroys life indiscriminately. It is a cruel method of warfare made increasingly more barbaric by the unethical exploitation of science.

The St. Petersburg Declaration of 1868 and The Hague Declaration of 1899 were the forerunners to the CWC. These agreements were a response to the emerging darker side of the scientific revolution. These efforts were in vain. Chemical weapons were used extensively during the First World War. In all, 1.3 million casualties resulted with nearly 100,000 dead. Never before had the world seen carnage of this nature and on this scale.

Once again, the international community sought a legal remedy – one that would be observed by all nations. The Geneva Protocol was adopted in 1925.

It banned the use of chemical and biological weapons. It did not, however, prohibit their production, development or stockpiling.

This proved to be a major loophole. Several countries continued to amass huge quantities of chemical weapons.

They have been used most recently in the ongoing civil war in Syria. And before that by the Saddam regime in its war against Iran and against its own people Kurds in Halabja.

Use of chemical weapons by terrorists in on-going conflicts in the Middle East has also been confirmed.

The lessons of history and the continuing tendency to use chemical weapons confirm the imperative of strengthening the CWC. It is the first multilateral treaty to ban an entire class of weapons of mass destruction with the application of verification.

It is comprehensive and non-discriminatory. It prohibits the development, production,

stockpiling, transfer, retention and use of chemical weapons. Provisions on verification serve not only to build confidence but also to deter.

The Convention makes no exceptions in prohibiting the possession of chemical weapons. All States Parties have equal rights and obligations. Those who possess chemical weapons must destroy their stockpiles. States Parties are also required to ensure that, within their domestic jurisdictions, chemistry is only used for peaceful purposes.

The total quantity of chemical warfare agents declared by 8 countries to the OPCW amounted to over 71,000 tonnes. 94% of these weapons have already been destroyed under verification by the OPCW. This is an historic achievement which is recognised by the Nobel Peace Prize Committee by selecting the OPCW in 2013.

The stockpiles of chemical weapons represent large quantities of highly lethal substances. Destroying them is dangerous, time-consuming and expensive. Amongst these are old and abandoned chemical weapons.

The two largest possessor States, namely Russia and the United States, are both progressing steadily towards the end goal of complete destruction of their stockpiles. This is expected to be completed by the year 2023.

All countries with chemical industry considered as capable under the Convention, must allow inspections by the OPCW. The purpose of these inspections is to verify that the production or consumption of relevant chemicals and precursors is only for legitimate activities. Some of these chemicals are dual use.

Since its inception, the Organisation has conducted nearly 3400 industry inspections.

The Convention also establishes a challenge-inspection mechanism as a verification tool to address well founded concerns about non-compliance. This is significant for its deterrent value. The Organisation has steadily enhanced its readiness to conduct such an inspection should a State Party ever request it.

A multilateral organisation of global character is a model of diversity. Amongst our Membership are countries with advanced chemical industry as well as those with hardly any. There is then a range of countries whose economies are developing or in transition.

No matter what the economic profile, the Convention requires something of every country. Even when there is no chemical industry to report, a country must file its declaration. More importantly, every country must have in place a national legislation based on the prohibitions of the Convention. In an era of a growing threat of chemical terrorism, such national enforcement contributes to collective security.

The core obligations of the Convention that serve its security goals are contained in its provisions covering disarmament and non-proliferation. However, its provisions on international cooperation, and, assistance and protection against chemical weapons are of vital importance

given that the majority of our Member States are countries with developing or transitional economies.

The OPCW thus also seeks to foster peaceful uses of chemistry. The Convention provides for the promotion of international cooperation and the exchange of scientific and technological information in the field of peaceful chemical activities. In this context, the Organisation has established a wide range of programmes including, for instance, the training of young chemists in industrial best practices and the promotion of analytical laboratory skills.

States Parties also undertake to provide assistance to other members should chemical weapons ever be used, or threatened to be used, against them. This, in fact, is an essential part of the security assurance that States receive by joining the Convention. For this mechanism to be effective, we work extensively with Member States to ensure that an adequate emergency response capacity is available at all times should the need ever arise.

As part of such preparedness, we have recently been engaged in the setting up of a Rapid Response and Assistance Mission (RRAM) to be deployed upon possible requests from our members for emergency measures of assistance in the case of use of chemical weapons.

The existence of a law does not always preclude its violation. Unfortunately, despite the progress towards chemical weapons abolition, these weapons have again been used recently.

In August of 2013, the world witnessed the brutal murder of 1400 innocent civilians in Ghouta - a densely populated suburb of Damascus. They were all victims of a deadly attack with nerve agent Sarin. It is a crime to use chemical weapons; and an atrocity to use it against civilians.

The incident created an outrage and an international crisis that threatened imminent conflict. A series of events unfolded culminating in Syria's decision to accede to the Convention. A wider war whose outcome was difficult to predict was averted.

Syria joined the Convention the following month after an agreement between the Russian Federation and the United States that was signed in Geneva. This marked a high point in the cooperation between these two major powers in dealing with the conflict in Syria. Their cooperation is critical in resolving issues that remain outstanding.

On 27 September that year, the OPCW Executive Council adopted a decision on the elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme. This decision was endorsed the same day by a UN Security Council resolution.

Given the on-going armed conflict, an accelerated plan of elimination of the Syrian programme was established by the Executive Council.

OPCW's work in Syria has been of a nature not foreseen in the Convention. But it serves to underscore, that with political will, and an appropriate level of support, the Organisation is capable of dealing with extra-ordinary situations.

This mission was an unprecedented challenge. It required us to operate in an active war zone within a time frame never before attempted.

Within days of these decisions, our inspectors were deployed to Syria. Following consultations between the UN Secretary-General and myself, the establishment of an OPCW-UN Joint Mission to oversee the implementation of the plan was announced.

The crucial initial tasks were successfully completed within a months' time. These included providing assistance to Syria in submitting the initial declaration of its chemical weapons programme, verifying production and storage sites and completing their functional destruction. With the support of more than 30 of our Member States, the bulk of chemical weapons material which amounted to 1300 metric tonnes was removed from Syria and destroyed outside its territory.

The United States provided facilities necessary to neutralize the most dangerous chemicals on board a naval vessel at sea. This required a major multinational maritime transport operation to remove and transport the Syrian chemicals. Denmark and Norway provided two cargo ships.

Italy allowed the use of one of its ports for chemicals brought from Syria by cargo vessels to be transferred onto the US ship Cape Ray for destruction at sea.

The destruction of chemicals removed from Syria occurred at commercial chemical disposal facilities located in different Member States. A massive procurement and delivery operation was carried out.

There is no denying that the humanitarian situation in Syria has continued to worsen. It is a tragedy of extraordinary proportions. It would, however, be a mistake to discount the importance of the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons programme. The continued presence of chemical weapons in the chaos of Syria could have been catastrophic. The part of the system of collective security that was allowed to function in Syria produced its results. The causes for frustrated efforts in bringing about the larger peace lie elsewhere.

This is not to say that our work in Syria has remained immune from the negative fallout of the political impasse over Syria. For after the disarmament mission was concluded, we encountered further challenges.

In the face of persistent and credible allegations that chlorine had been used in Syria as a chemical weapon, I established a Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) in April 2014.

In an attempt to visit a location that had allegedly been attacked with chlorine in the Hama province, the FFM came under armed attack by an unknown party.

Fortunately, all the team members remained unharmed and returned to safety. While an incident such as this could have derailed the entire Mission, it was nonetheless able to complete its enquiry and issued its reports concluding with a high degree of confidence that chlorine had in fact been used a weapon.

Since then, the Fact Finding Mission has examined a significant number of other incidents and substantiated the use of chlorine as a weapon in other cases as well. It has also confirmed an instance of the use of sulfur mustard.

The Fact Finding Mission's mandate was confined to establishing whether or not chlorine or other toxic substances had been used as weapons. It did not go further into any attribution.

In response to the findings of the FFM, in August of 2015, the Security Council established the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism.

It is this mechanism which is mandated to identify the perpetrators of chemical weapon attacks in Syria. It has reported its findings to the UN Security Council re-confirming the use of chemical weapons.

Adding to the complexity of our work in Syria is the question of clarifying certain elements of the Syrian Arab Republic's declaration of its chemical weapons programme. A team of experts called the Declaration Assessment Team has been engaged with Syria in an effort to clarify several outstanding issues.

The purpose of this exercise is to arrive at a declaration that will be regarded by our States Parties as complete and accurate. I have continued to underscore to my Syrian interlocutors the necessity of bringing this matter to a closure through the provision of scientifically and technically plausible explanations on the unresolved questions.

The mechanisms for verification contained in disarmament treaties are designed for execution during peace time. The OPCW was however called upon to carry out missions in extremely risky environments in Syria, and recently Libya.

Last year, at the request of the Libyan government, and endorsed by the Security Council in its resolution 2298 (2016), the country's remaining chemical weapons precursors were removed from its territory for destruction abroad.

This swift and successful operation demonstrated effective preventive action to safeguard potentially dangerous chemicals from falling into the wrong hands.

The ability to effectively respond to such contingencies will not be the only challenge for us in the future.

Not too long ago, the strong support for the global ban on chemical weapons - evident in the rapid growth in the membership of the OPCW - had seemed to preclude any further instances of aggression involving chemical weapons.

We now know that there is no room for complacency. Chemical weapons have continued to be used.

It is difficult to comprehend the perverse mentality that shows such blatant disregard for human life. But that tragically remains the reality; a reality that serves a cold reminder. Human progress for all its achievements is not in itself a guarantor of peace.

We have to constantly and actively work for peace. And this cannot be accomplished without concerted efforts, without rising above parochial national interests and without continually strengthening the global institutions that are indispensable to this endeavour.

Despite the existence of one of the most successful disarmament treaties ever, the violation of its fundamental prohibitions is a matter of serious concern. This also means that our work is far from over.

Getting the world to agree on a norm requires hard work; to make that norm truly universal and enduring it is even more challenging.

Another challenge is to ensure the full universality of the Convention. The motto of our Organisation is 'working together for a world free from chemical weapons'. A factor obstructing this vision is non-adherence by a handful of States that remain outside the Convention.

I continue to use every opportunity to stress the importance of Egypt, Israel, North Korea and South Sudan joining the Convention at the earliest.

South Sudan is actively considering its membership, North Korea never responds to our demarches, others express reservations based on what they consider regional security considerations. Quite the contrary, their acceptance of the Convention can only help promote a climate of trust and will benefit regional and global security.

A truly universal Convention will impart even greater authority to measures against threats that affect all nations. The threat from terrorists represents an ever present danger. We know from our recent missions that a terrorist organisation has in fact used chemical weapons in Syria and in Iraq.

The international legal framework offers several avenues for greater cooperation and coordination between international organisations in the context of counter-terrorism.

The OPCW's open-ended working group on terrorism regularly reviews such mechanisms and opportunities for enhanced interaction and coordination.

At the same time, our Member States have stressed that the Chemical Weapons Convention already has a sound legal framework.

Effective enforcement of this framework would serve to criminalise the development, production, stockpiling and transfer of chemical weapons or their use by all natural or legal persons under the jurisdiction of individual States Parties.

In other words, the full and effective implementation of the Convention under the domestic laws of all 192 Member States and greater controls over substances of concern is the best prescription

to prevent acts of chemical terrorism.

A legal framework through legislation and the means to enforce it creates the domestic capacity to monitor, to report, and to guide activities involving chemicals along peaceful and productive lines.

We assist our States Parties in this important area through training programmes, information-sharing and capacity-building activities. These are designed to promote best practices in legal processes and enforcement.

There was a time after the Convention came into force in 1997 when a major part of our effort and resources were focused on destroying the huge quantities of declared chemical weapons. This is understandable.

The world wanted to finally bury a nasty legacy spanning most of the last century. It was also keen for a decisive reversal of a mind-set that marked the Cold War.

The experiences of the last few years have taught us that there are now more complex dynamics at work.

The extraordinary missions carried out by the OPCW, the continuing use of chemical weapons, the threat of terrorism and the rapid advances in science and technology highlight the need for more not less attention to the task of strengthening the norms of the Convention.

In order to prevent the re-emergence of chemical weapons, its verification regime must keep pace with the growing number of chemical facilities and capabilities that did not exist at the time the Convention was negotiated. We also need to keep a close watch on the impact of emerging technologies.

Monitoring and inspection activities cannot cover the entire global chemical industry given its scope and scale. What is important is to enhance our engagement and outreach, and to nurture a culture of responsible science in our research institutions, universities, and in our schools. The aim should be to develop and promote professional ethics that support the aims of the CWC.

We have facilitated discussions by scientists from across the globe, in developing the Hague Guidelines which is a code of ethics for chemistry professionals. These guidelines have been widely endorsed by leading scientific and industry associations.

The OPCW Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) comprises 25 eminent experts and is tasked with the responsibility to keep developments in science and technology under review. Their work will continue to assume increasing importance.

Together with the scientific and technical work of the SAB, the Organisation has made education and outreach a core part of our activities.

For this purpose, an Advisory Board on Education and Outreach has recently been established. This body will guide development of new activities, materials and e-learning tools to increase awareness of the dangers posed by the possible misuse of dual-use technology. They will also

help us to expand our reach into universities and schools.

The example of implementing a global prohibition on chemical weapons, despite its complexity and challenges, illustrates the limitless possibilities of multilateral cooperation for common causes.

Even in a world that sometimes seems frustratingly divided, the CWC and the work of the OPCW show that opportunities will not shut their door provided we remain steadfast in supporting global norms and not lose sight of our common good.

The progress and successes of the OPCW represent a strong international consensus against chemical weapons.

After 20 years of implementing a major international treaty, our experience teaches us one key lesson. We cannot rest on our laurels. What we have achieved is valuable.

It represents advancement not only in the field of disarmament but also towards humanitarian ideals. But we must continue to work together.

Our technological world is delicately balanced. On the one hand we have the means to bring about universal prosperity. On the other, we also possess the tools for self-destruction. We can never become complacent of this reality and must therefore continually strive for a better world. And, this can only be realised through a shared vision and a shared sense of responsibility.

The example of the ban on chemical weapons shows a path towards finding solutions to problems in the field of arms control and disarmament that might initially appear insurmountable.

The Convention and the OPCW constitute an essential part of the global system designed to enhance international peace and security. I feel confident that the Organisation will continue to play a major role in making our world a safer place for us and for future generations.

Thank you.