



ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

First Scientific International Conference On CBRNE (SICC)

Twenty years after the entry into force of the Chemical Weapons Convention: looking back and looking forward

Keynote Speech by Director-General Ahmet Üzümcü

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REMARKS AS DELIVERED

Minister Incarnato, Professor Licoccia, Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

I wish to open my remarks with a warm welcome to all of you. I also express my heartfelt gratitude to the University of Rome tor Vargata and the Health Safety Environmental Research Association Rome (HESAR) for arranging this side event as part of the 1st Scientific International Conference on CBRNE, (SICC).

Italy has consistently demonstrated its strong commitment to the goals of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). This is manifest in its numerous initiatives and activities in support of the OPCW for the past 20 years.

Italy's contribution to the mission to eliminate the Syrian Arab Republic's chemical weapons programme stands out both in financial terms and in kind contributions. The use of the Gioia Tauro port was critical to the programme for the removal and destruction of Syrian chemicals outside its territory. I wish to once again acknowledge the vital support of Italy to our work and to thank the Italian government and its agencies including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for being at the forefront of the mission towards a chemical-weapons-free world.

We are commemorating 20 years of a unique undertaking. In 1997, the coming into force of the CWC and thereby the establishment of a total global prohibition of chemical weapons marked a truly historic moment. An entire category of weapons of mass destruction was decisively outlawed by the international community with no exceptions, reservations or loopholes. Verification was agreed as a crucial means to ensure that all those joining the Convention demonstrated their compliance with its provisions.

A momentous treaty like the CWC impacts not only the subject of its direct relevance but also creates landmarks in the progress towards a more orderly, law-based and humane world order. The Convention thus symbolises the primacy of respect for agreed rules over arbitrary and

irresponsible behaviour; the sanctity of humanitarian norms over unconstrained warfare and the importance of multilateral approaches to solving global problems.

It also signifies a way in which to resolve the tension between the ever growing benefits of science and the inherent dangers of scientific advancements if left unmediated by ethical considerations. It is precisely disregard for such ethical and moral imperatives that led to the development of chemical weapons in our age of science and technology. The implementation of the CWC by the OPCW is meant to reverse this unfortunate legacy by eliminating chemical weapons from the world and by working to ensure that these never re-emerge.

The famous Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico had said that, “uniform ideas originating among entire peoples unknown to each other must have a common ground of truth”. People of goodwill everywhere were repulsed by the spectre of chemical weapons and chemical warfare. And so efforts to prohibit chemical weapons are a credit to the persistence of all nations who wanted to see an end to this kind of cruelty. It took them almost a century to devise a complete, comprehensive and verifiable international legal tool to ban these inhumane weapons.

It takes continuing commitment to ensure that it is implemented effectively through the work of the OPCW. 192 States Parties are currently members of this Organisation. With the exception of just a few countries, this number represents almost the entire membership of the United Nations. The first edition of the Scientific Conference of CBRNE is indeed a fitting forum to mark the OPCW’s 20th Anniversary. As we near the achievement of our priority goal of eliminating the world’s chemical stockpiles, we are shifting our focus and our resources from verification of destruction, to assisting States Parties in preventing the re-emergence of these abhorrent weapons, and effectively responding should the worst occur.

The work of the OPCW is about implementing a prohibition - a comprehensive ban on chemical weapons that applies globally. Prohibition is the first line of defence. At the same time, prevention is necessary for no matter how strong the prohibition, someone, somewhere is likely to breach it. We must therefore redouble our efforts on both fronts; to make the prohibition stronger, but to also be fully prepared if the worst were to happen. This calls for greater international cooperation and coordination.

The experts gathered here are crucial partners in this endeavour. Enriching our engagement and building bridges with academia, scientific community, industry, and policy makers, is essential to our mission of protecting the world from the threat of chemical weapons.

Following the creation of the OPCW in 1997, the first order of business towards making our world free of chemical weapons was to destroy all declared stockpiles. Today, 95 percent of these have been verifiably eliminated. This is a key achievement of the CWC. It makes a lasting impact on global peace and security. Destruction of the remaining weapons continues, and will be completed in the coming five years.

Disarmament and non-proliferation go hand in hand. Non-proliferation in the context of the Convention means the assurance that the production of chemicals remains devoted to peaceful purposes. This is promoted through regular inspections at relevant industrial facilities worldwide. There are over 5,000 chemical industrial plants which are subject to verification by the OPCW. Over the last twenty years, thousands of verification-related inspections have been conducted. On any given day, chemical industry somewhere in the world is being inspected as part of a regime that builds mutual confidence and trust.

The Italian chemical industry has proved to be a key partner in this area. Italy represents the third largest producer of chemicals in the European Union and the sixth largest in the world. About 2,800 companies are active in the sector employing over 100,000 thousand people. Strong research and development centers are present on its territory, supporting a wide variety of chemical products, often of small to medium size. With nearly 200 facilities currently declared, Italy has received about 170 industry inspections since the entry into force of the Convention. Both the government and the industry have extended excellent support and assistance to the OPCW's inspection teams.

Italy has also established national measures to ensure the effective functioning of industry verification. These include serious penalties for incorrect or missing declarations of industrial activities on the part of the economic operators. Effective implementing legislation is crucial for the successful ban on chemical weapons. Comprehensive national implementation allows for the Convention's international obligations to be applicable and enforceable vis-à-vis individuals and groups operating within a State's jurisdiction and to prevent and prosecute possible misuses of chemicals. The relevance of such implementation by all countries in the context of the international community's efforts to prevent terrorists and other criminals from accessing chemical weapons and using them is self-evident.

Looking back we can take satisfaction that the first comprehensive disarmament treaty in the field of weapons of mass destruction has not only been successful, but it has in many ways exceeded expectations. However, we are also acutely aware of the challenges ahead. Preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons will remain a permanent goal. And as the security challenges continue to become more complex, we will need to deploy a multiplicity of tools.

Already in the recent past, the Organisation's ability to respond to new and unprecedented situations was seriously tested in the case of our mission in Syria. In 2013, an unprecedented chemical disarmament programme was launched, which quickly eliminated the capacity to produce chemical weapons in Syria and then removed 1300 tons of declared chemical weapons that were destroyed outside Syrian territory. This OPCW-UN Joint Mission was undertaken in the midst of a civil war. The cooperation and support of over 30 contributing States Parties and the European Union were critical to this endeavour.

Our work in Syria however did not end at that. In April 2014, I established a Fact-Finding Mission, which confirmed the use of chlorine as a weapon in northern Syria. The work of the OPCW Fact Finding Mission was followed up by the UN Security Council which established the

OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM). Its purpose is to identify the perpetrators of chemical weapons attacks in Syria – and hopefully, to bring them to justice. The findings reported so far by the JIM are of course disturbing. The OPCW FFM and the JIM continue to investigate the most recent allegations of use of chemical weapons in Syria, including the reported Sarin use in Khan Sheikhoun.

With a global ban in place and legally accepted by an overwhelming majority of countries of the world, aggression with chemical weapons seemed to have become a thing of the past. We now know that there is no room for complacency. Chemical weapons have continued to be used. Human progress for all that it has achieved still does not preclude breaches of international norms. We have to continually and consciously work to uphold them. On the part of the OPCW, this means working on multiple fronts, adapting in the face of rapid advances in science and technology and serving as an effective forum for assisting our States Parties to deal with the new security risks and threats.

The Chemical Weapons Convention is underpinned by science and technology. Indeed, rapid advances in those fields will be one of the drivers shaping our future. This has implications for the Convention's verification regime as the global chemical industry continuously reshapes itself. New technologies and new production processes which may impact the effectiveness of the Convention are being invented constantly. This makes it necessary for us to have the ability to detect new chemicals and establish if they are relevant to the Convention. Similarly, we need to acquire a deeper understanding of the growing interaction between chemistry and biology which also gives rise to the ability to produce potentially dangerous chemicals through new techniques and methods.

The OPCW Scientific Advisory Board, which is composed of eminent experts from 25 different States Parties, helps to keep us abreast of these developments. The independent scientific advice we receive through the Board acts as an early-warning system. It allows us to recognise where new developments could have an impact on implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Advancements in chemistry cannot of course be constrained. But it is imperative to monitor these closely, to utilise them for improving verification and protection measures and to promote ethical practices through awareness raising and education. The effective use of science and technology also means maintaining the ability to detect the presence of chemical warfare agents through skilful sample collection and analysis.

Sampling and analysis for example have been crucial in our recent missions to determine the validity of an allegation of use of chemical weapons. Samples taken in support of these investigations are transported to the OPCW Lab, where each sample is split into multiple aliquots. Identical sets of samples are then sent to two of our partner labs for analysis. If there is conflict between the results, another set of samples is sent to a third laboratory.

The OPCW's network of designated Laboratories are highly capable and are able to analyse environmental and bio-medical samples. We currently have 23 Labs from 17 Member States in our network; 13 of these Labs are designated for both bio-medical and environmental analysis.

I have recently established a Temporary Working Group of the Scientific Advisory Board to conduct an in-depth review of the methods and technologies used in our investigative work. The Group will identify the capabilities, skill sets and equipment needed to augment and strengthen the Secretariat's capacities to conduct contingency operations. The spectre of chemical terrorism is no longer just a possibility on the horizon. Countering this threat will require action on many fronts using all available tools, including multilateral coordination and legislative means.

The OPCW's Open-ended Working Group on Terrorism is tasked with identifying opportunities for enhanced interaction and coordination with relevant international bodies. A Sub-Working Group focusses particular attention on the problem of non-State actors.

We also have an active partnership with the United Nations Counter Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF). Together with the IAEA, the OPCW co-chairs the working group on preventing and responding to WMD terrorist attacks with chemical or biological weapons. On the legal front, ensuring that all our States Parties have effective legal and other regulatory measures in place, and supporting internal structures to administer them is critical. These legal frameworks provide the foundation of preventing non-State actors from gaining access to materials that could aid the development of chemical weapons.

OPCW dedicates considerable effort and resources to assist our States Parties in fulfilling their obligations. The Secretariat reviews drafts of implementing legislation in order to ensure that the drafts meet the requirements of the Convention. Our Internship Programme for Legal Drafters and National Authority Representatives assists States Parties in drafting implementing legislation. Effective domestic implementation also means fulfilling the requirements of UN Security Council resolution 1540 (2004). The OPCW, with its institutional capacity, experience and implementation support record, is uniquely placed to advance the objectives of that resolution.

When preventative measures fail, we must be prepared to respond. We work extensively with States Parties to ensure that an effective emergency response capacity is available at all times should the need ever arise. As part of such preparedness, the OPCW established a Rapid Response and Assistance Mission (RRAM), which can be deployed upon request from States Parties. The RRAM can quickly provide emergency measures of assistance in the case of use of chemical weapons. The RRAM is equipped with analytical equipment to detect toxic chemicals, secure the affected area, and provide assistance to victims.

Importantly, the team is enabled to cooperate and coordinate with UN and other relevant international organisations. In January, we tested the RRAM at a table-top exercise held in the framework of the UN Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (UNCTITF) at OPCW

headquarters. The exercise clearly demonstrated that should the worst occur, we as international organisations must respond collectively, drawing on the strengths of each agency

The OPCW also works with States Parties to develop national and regional capacities to manage and mitigate the use or threat of use of chemical weapons. This is achieved through a comprehensive programme of training and capacity building for first responders and other relevant agencies in States Parties. This training programme facilitates the exchange of skill and expertise among practitioners, with an emphasis on regional cooperation. The benefit of this approach is that the skills and capacities developed to counter a chemical weapons threat are transferrable to responding to industrial accidents or other scenarios involving toxic chemicals.

In this context, we regard our collaboration with the University of Rome tor Vargata of particular importance. Advances in science and technology are producing improvements to protective measures against exposure to chemical weapons. This is true in the life sciences, which provide opportunities for developing better medical counter-measures for those affected by exposure to hazardous chemicals, as well as treatment for the longer-term effects of such exposure. Advances in materials, science and nanotechnology have allowed us to greatly improve protective equipment, thus ensuring the health and safety of those who are exposed to chemicals, both in response to chemical attacks as well as accidents.

Under the auspices of a range of programmes, we hold workshops and exchanges designed to assist States Parties in realising the benefits of these advances. The majority of this work is targeting countries with developing economies and economies in transition. The principle that informs this work is twofold. Firstly, that durable security must be based on equitable access to scientific knowledge and technical know-how, and secondly that all States Parties must have at least a basic capacity to implement the Convention from a scientific and technical perspective.

As we shift focus away from destroying existing chemical weapons to preventing re-emergence, new approaches are needed. This will require expanding our reach in terms of awareness, and deepening our relationships with key partners in science, academia and industry. To this end, the OPCW has established an Advisory Board on Education and Outreach. This body guides the development of new activities, and teaching tools to increase awareness of the dangers posed by the possible misuse of dual-use technology. They also help us to expand our reach into universities and schools in order to nurture a culture of responsible science. The goal is to develop and promote professional ethics that support the aims of the CWC.

Over the last twenty-years, the CWC and the OPCW have forged a path that has led to a safer and more secure world. The collective progress the international community has made towards eliminating chemical weapons reaches beyond the field of disarmament, and touches on humanitarian ideals.

Our achievements are valuable, but we must not rest on our laurels. It is very clear that despite our progress and the noble aims of the Convention, the people of the world are not yet free from the scourge of chemical weapons.

The threat remains and it requires a concrete and coordinated response by governments, scientists, academia, industry and international organisations. Our field of cooperation continues to grow to embrace an ever-wider group of stakeholders committed to peace and security. I feel confident that the Organisation will continue to make our world a safer place for us, and for future generations. I wish you a productive and fruitful conference.

I thank you for your attention.
