



ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

**Statement by Ambassador Ahmet Üzümcü, Director-General OPCW
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Arms Control, Disarmament and Non-proliferation
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REMARKS AS DELIVERED

Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to speak to you on the occasion of the annual NATO Conference on Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) Arms Control, Disarmament and Non-proliferation.

I wish at the outset to thank Finland for its continuous contribution towards the success of the Chemical Weapons Convention, both politically and through the most substantive programmes.

VERIFIN was recognised in 2014 by the OPCW-The Hague Award in recognition of its outstanding contributions to the achievement of the goals of the CWC.

In a world of growing complexity and rapid advancement, certain fundamental ethical and moral principles remain unalterable. We recognise them as the timeless norms and values with universal appeal and general acceptance. These range from the most simple such as honesty and truthfulness to those that have evolved from human interactions, good and bad.

One such rule prohibits the use of excessive or indiscriminate force and stipulates the protection of civilians in times of armed conflict.

Ingrained in our habits and customs, such norms provide the foundation for the international system and its structures of global governance. These include a network of international treaties supported by partnerships and organisations – intergovernmental, non-governmental and regional.

Efforts against weapons of mass destruction and their proliferation draw their legitimacy on account of such fundamental principles. And once these are codified in international treaties, their

observance is elevated from moral necessity to legal liability. Violations are not only to be condemned but to be made accountable.

20 years ago, the international community codified the rules against the use of poison as a method of warfare into a binding legal document we call the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC).

This year in commemorating the two decades of the operation of this treaty and its implementing body the OPCW, we have the occasion to review our progress but to also reflect on the challenges ahead of us.

For most of these twenty years, the Organisation worked out of public limelight quietly progressing towards an unprecedented goal of completely eliminating an entire category of WMD and strengthening the norm against its use.

What has been achieved bears no precedent in the history of disarmament.

The Convention was the result of tragedy wrought by chemical weapons, a loathing for these indiscriminate agents of destruction, and one hundred years of diplomacy. It has become one of the world's vanguards against weapons of mass destruction, and represents today, an essential component of the international legal and security system. It represents the commitment of 192 states to work together towards a world free of chemical weapons. It constitutes nothing less than a permanent barrier against chemical warfare, for the present, and for generations to come.

In the two decades of its existence, OPCW's work has involved a multiplicity of tasks. It has conducted extensive verification of destruction – which is at the level of 95% - as well as thousands of inspections in the chemical industry. Importantly, it has also established good practices in several areas relevant to preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons. These include the monitoring of transfers of scheduled chemicals, assistance and protection against chemical weapons, engaging the global public, undertaking tasks in international cooperation, capacity building, and knowledge sharing, and promoting the peaceful uses of chemistry.

At the same time we are aware of the significance of this particularly challenging moment in the history of the chemical weapons ban.

Our work in Syria represents unfinished business but we have before us a broader set of questions that touch upon the longer term.

What is to be the future of the prohibition on chemical weapons? Should we consider our objectives to have been successfully fulfilled once declared arsenals are destroyed? Will our role in disarmament change in any significant way?

There is no doubt that in Syria, the Organisation faced its greatest challenge and continues to grapple with on-going issues.

One of the keys to the success of the OPCW as an international organisation has always been the spirit of cooperation in which the Convention has been implemented by States Parties.

The mission in Syria was without parallel and relied on the commitment and dedication of the OPCW staff backed up by the United Nations and the concerted actions of States Parties who provided technical, financial and political support for the mission.

Our work in Syria however did not end with the elimination of its production capacity and the removal and destruction of its declared chemical weapons.

In April 2014, I established a Fact-Finding Mission to investigate allegations of use of Chlorine as a chemical weapon in Syria. Since that time, nineteen separate missions have been deployed. In a number of cases the results have confirmed with a high level of confidence the use of toxic chemicals and sulfur mustard as weapons.

The investigation into the widely reported incident at Khan Shaykhun is underway. In liaison with the United Nations, a possible visit to the alleged site of the incident is under consideration. Given the sensitivity of the mission and past experience, on-site activities are dependent on the most stringent security assurances for the FFM. Meanwhile the FFM is conducting a complete analysis of the information and data at its disposal, including the results of sample analyses and mapping of the location of victims.

Attributing responsibility is not within the remit of the FFM. This function has been assigned by the UN Security Council to the Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM).

What is important to remember is that though I established the Fact Finding Mission, all States Parties, including Syria, concurred with this mechanism. It was under the circumstances the best possible means to address the allegations of use.

After the elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme under the most compressed timelines, the work of the FFM demonstrates that the Convention and the OPCW can adapt to new and unprecedented situations in order to serve the object and purpose of the Convention.

It is also important to bear in mind that the international community has forcefully condemned any use of chemical weapons by anyone under any circumstances. Both the Executive Council and the UN Security Council have by consensus recognised the facts about the use of chemical weapons in Syria.

Another complexity that continues to attend our work in Syria relates to the question of clarifying certain elements of the Syria's declaration of its chemical weapons programme. 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. Access to individuals with an overarching knowledge of the Syrian chemical weapons programme needs to be provided.

The CWC constitutes a permanent prohibition against chemical weapons. To work for the

preservation of its norms is a responsibility that we simply cannot shirk from. We must ensure that the Convention will remain a strong and effective instrument well into the future.

The destruction of the last of the declared chemical weapons will mark a new era for the Organisation. However, preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons will remain our enduring goal in an age of continuing advances in science and technology as well as new security challenges.

This will not be a single track undertaking. We need to work on multiple fronts.

While advances in science and technology are the harbingers of a better future they will also inevitably impact the Convention's verification regime.

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, comprising eminent experts from 25 different States Parties, helps to keep us abreast of these developments.

The Board's recent work has been invaluable in offering advice on monitoring progress on science, evaluating its impact for the Convention and how the Secretariat can prepare itself for future verification tasks.

The effective use of new scientific methods and procedures also promises the ability to detect the presence of chemical warfare agents through improved sample collection and analysis.

One of our future projects pertains to upgrading the OPCW Chemical Laboratory to a Center for Chemistry and Technology.

The objective is to strengthen OPCW's Science and Technology capabilities to fully address the threat of chemical weapons, as well as to support capacity building in our States Parties. The OPCW Laboratory is under this initiative envisaged to be expanded and bolstered with additional capabilities benefiting from recent advances in science and technology.

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 continues to loom and demands more effective multilateral coordination as well as improving national implementation of the Convention globally. The OPCW's Open-ended Working Group on Terrorism explores ways and means for enhanced interaction and coordination with relevant international bodies.

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 establish effective legal and other regulatory and the necessary domestic structures to administer them is critical. The existence of laws and the ability to enforce them is essential in preventing non-state actors from gaining access to materials and equipment that could be used for the production of chemical weapons.

Although more needs to be done, the domestic implementation of the CWC has continually improved. Over the years we have created and improved upon programmes that assist our States Parties in this regard. Programmes that, for example, offer reviews by the Secretariat of drafts of implementing legislation, or internship for legal drafters are a few examples.

UN Security Council resolution 1540 (2004) represents an important instrument for denying weapons of mass destruction capabilities to non-state actors. At its heart lies the same notion of effective national legal frameworks and enforcement ability.

Here I wish to underscore the importance, in my view of, greater collaboration between international organisations. This should be institutionalised rather than be an imposition of circumstance.

We have a long standing Relationship Agreement with the United Nations. Anticipating developments in Syria quite earlier than the Ghouta attacks, we initiated and concluded a supplementary arrangement setting out the modalities and procedures for a possible investigation of alleged use under the Secretary General's mechanism in which OPCW experts and resources are to be placed at his disposal. We were, therefore, fully prepared when the Secretary General initiated his investigations in 2013. Later, we had the experience of the OPCW-UN Joint Mission in Syria for the elimination of the Chemical Weapons Program.

These are just a few examples of how cooperation and collaboration can prepare us all to better deal with contingencies when they occur.

I believe policy making organs of various international organisation should devote attention to identifying many avenues of cooperation that present themselves as amenable to the pooling of expertise and resources and the utilisation of synergies in order to deal with global challenges. Differences in membership, some political sensitivities should not be insurmountable if we are going to work collectively for the common good.

A significant incentive for countries joining the CWC is the assurances of security that the Convention offers in terms of assistance and protection against chemical weapons. 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.

Through OPCW cooperation programmes, our States Parties are made aware of the benefits of scientific and technological advances which they can utilise to improve upon their own national protection and response capacities.

The objective of preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons cannot be confined to the contribution of a limited audience. It will benefit from an expansion in our reach in terms of awareness, and by 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 disseminate our message to 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 regime has made a major contribution to the international goals of peace and security. The lessons of our accomplishments are important not only for the future of our own regime, but for the wider field of weapons of mass destruction disarmament and non-proliferation.

Regimes such as the CWC are not built overnight. Time, resources and an extraordinary cooperative spirit have built up an institution that serves a vital purpose and offers a wealth of accumulated knowledge and experience. We must work together to not only preserve this enterprise but to strengthen it further to meet the challenges of an uncertain future.

At this juncture it is important to reaffirm our commitment to the ideal of a world free of chemical weapons. We would thus demonstrate that the defining feature of our global civilisation is not only its technological prowess but also its devotion to spreading the message of peace and humanity.

I thank you for your attention.