



ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

Statement by the Director-General

At the Institute for Political and International Studies

Tehran, Iran

2 July 2017

REMARKS AS DELIVERED

Ambassador Rezvani,
Ambassador Jahangiri,
Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I take this opportunity to thank the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran for inviting me to visit Tehran. I am grateful for the warm hospitality accorded to me. The Islamic Republic of Iran has borne the painful experience of the use of chemical weapons against its people. This year we are commemorating the 20th anniversary of the operation of a treaty that has special significance for Iran which is also marking the 30th anniversary of the tragedy of Sardasht. My presence here today signifies our solidarity with those whose lives have been scarred by that atrocity and as a mark of respect to those who perished.

The Chemical Weapons Convention represents the culmination of the international community's long quest to completely prohibit one of the most inhumane means of warfare known to mankind. This unique treaty was born of the international community's determined efforts to outlaw chemical weapons in a manner free from loopholes or exceptions. It took over a century to reach this goal. And, the result constitutes a landmark in the international community's quest for global security.

Attaining a world without chemical weapons is an objective that significantly advances both disarmament and international law. The OPCW's motto captures the essence of our endeavours: "Working together towards a world free of chemical weapons". The OPCW has worked in a steadfast manner towards the realisation of this objective. The use of chemical weapons as a weapon of mass destruction is unfortunately a development of an era that otherwise boasts unprecedented civilizational advancement.

We live in the age of science and technology. The impact of technical progress is felt in every sphere of life. Every scientific breakthrough opens up new possibilities for human progress. Knowledge enriches and edifies. Yet we hardly know of a major discovery or invention that did not also open up dark possibilities.

Our celebration of science therefore runs parallel to our anxieties about self-preservation. In an age of mass communication, we are not free from the fear of mass destruction. The story of the Chemical Weapons Convention represents a key example of how humanity can resolve this conundrum by transforming ethical and moral imperatives into law to be respected by all countries.

Over one hundred years ago, the first large-scale use of chemical weapons occurred in the trenches of World War I. By the war's end, nearly one million soldiers would bear the scars of chemical weapons, and 100,000 would lose their lives. The world became aware of a new and cruel type of warfare and resolved to prevent it.

The path was not easy. Chemical warfare continued to bring devastation around the world and across generations. In the end, persistence paid. The conclusion of the CWC and its entry into force in 1997 marked a watershed. The international community's long-standing efforts to comprehensively ban chemical weapons finally become a reality. The Convention is recognised as a major disarmament treaty and a response to a deeply felt humanitarian impulse; to eliminate an abhorrent tool of warfare. It represents a tribute to the memory of the countless victims who perished or suffered from the effects of chemical weapons. Each year on 28 June, we remember in particular the victims of Sardasht and convey to its authorities and its people our sympathies.

This year in marking the 20th anniversary of the entry into force of the CWC, we are reminded that the singular inspiration for our work at the OPCW is the collective sense of responsibility to spare humanity from the horrors of chemical weapons. The Convention represents the will of the international community to preclude forever the use of chemical weapons anywhere in the world. Much has been achieved towards that end. And much remains to be done for we know from recent experience that there are those who continue to defy the norm.

Destruction of chemical weapons being one of our core objectives, over 95% of some 72 000 tons of declared chemical warfare agents have been destroyed under verification by the OPCW. This work makes a major contribution to peace and security. For the first time in history weapons of mass destruction have actually been destroyed under an international treaty and under multilateral supervision. The Organisation has over the last twenty years made many other significant strides in fulfilling its mandate.

An effective and reliable verification regime serves as a crucial confidence-building measure. Our international cooperation programmes continue to promote a sense of participation and ownership amongst our States Parties, particularly those whose economies are growing. Assistance and protection against chemical weapons is an important right enjoyed by States Parties. Our programmes in this area continue to strengthen. National implementation of the Convention is showing encouraging progress. Only four countries in the world remain uncommitted to the Convention's legal obligations.

During this period we have also carried out some unprecedented missions such as our work in Syria. In August of 2013, the world witnessed the killing of 1400 innocent civilians in Ghouta. Unarmed and innocent civilians that included scores of children living in a densely populated neighbourhood were brutally murdered with the nerve agent sarin. One wonders at the utter lack of humanity of those who perpetrated this unforgivable atrocity.

The incident rightly created an outrage in the global community. A crisis threatening an international armed conflict seemed imminent. This was averted when Syria joined the CWC following an agreement signed in Geneva between the Russian Federation and the United States of America. Far reaching decisions were adopted by the Executive Council of the OPCW and the UN Security Council.

The mission that followed to remove Syria's chemical weapons was unprecedented. It required us to operate in uncertain and risky conditions in an active war zone within a very ambitious time frame. Although clearly challenging, the mission underscores that with political will and cooperation, the Organisation and the international community are capable of dealing with extraordinary situations.

With the support of more than 30 States Parties, 1300 metric tonnes of chemical weapons material was removed from Syria and destroyed outside its territory. This was an impressive achievement. Unfortunately it did not mark the end of our work in Syria. In the face of persistent and credible allegations that chlorine was being used in Syria as a chemical weapon, I established a Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) in April 2014. Since that time, the Fact-Finding Mission has examined a significant number of incidents and substantiated several cases of the use of toxic chemicals as weapons and an incident involving sulfur mustard.

In early April, credible reports emerged of another brutal attack in Khan Shaykhun area of Idlib province. The FFM has confirmed this as an attack with Sarin, a nerve agent and Category I chemical weapon. With the norms of the Convention accepted globally, we would all have hoped and wished that the ugly legacy of use of chemical weapons had been finally buried; that a dark chapter of history had been forever closed.

We were and remain committed as stated in the preamble of the Convention 'to exclude completely the possibility of the use of chemical weapons.' This is behaviour that flies in the face of every civilized norm and cannot be tolerated. No religion or culture rationalises such brutality. The Organisation not only has the mandate but an absolute responsibility to do everything within its capacity to confront this situation.

\In my statement at the time the FFM report on Khan Shaykhun was issued last week, I strongly condemned this atrocity which completely goes against the norms enshrined in the Chemical Weapons Convention. I also urged that the perpetrators of this horrific attack be held accountable for their crimes. In this context, the work of the Joint Investigative Mechanism which has the mandate to identify the perpetrators assumes high importance. In commemorating the 30th anniversary of the tragedy at Sardasht, there can be no better homage to the memory of its victims than our clear condemnation of those who are continuing to use chemical weapons.

As challenging as our work has been, and as steady as we have been in our journey towards a world free of chemical weapons, the tasks ahead are complex and require continued and strong commitment. As we near the goal of completing the destruction of declared chemical weapons, the OPCW and the global community must prepare for an era where preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons will be the main priority.

The Organisation has proven its resilience and adaptability to new situations and challenges. To ensure that it will continue to effectively serve its purpose requires an investment into the future. With nearly 3400 industry inspections, the CWC verification regime is a well tried and tested tool for promoting confidence in compliance with the Convention. We should however be mindful of the growth of the global chemical industry. States Parties have declared over 5,300 chemical production facilities, which are producing an ever wider range of new compounds.

The geographic footprint of the chemical industry is also evolving. Rapid growth is occurring in Asia. Since the inception of the Convention, over 50% of the global chemical industry has become concentrated in this region. Further industry expansion is expected into the African region in the coming years. In addition to growth in the industry, advances in chemistry, chemical technology and engineering are rapidly transforming the industry which will 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.

In this context, the role of the OPCW Scientific Advisory Board continues to assume ever greater importance. An eminent former member of the Board is Iran's Dr Mahdi Balali-Mood a leading expert in the field of medical toxicology. He has dedicated his career to caring and advocating for the victims of chemical weapons. In recognition of his outstanding contribution in his field, he was the recipient of the OPCW-The Hague Award in 2015. Maintaining a close relationship with National Authorities, scientists and experts, industry, international partners and non-government organisations is important for global chemical security and the effectiveness of the Convention.

While stockpiles of weapons diminish, the threat of chemical terrorism is rising. Activities of non-state-actors are now a major concern. We have already seen the willingness and ability of some groups of obtaining and using chemical weapons. To counter such threats, including threats against the physical integrity of infrastructure and transportation involving chemicals, the OPCW is working with its Member States to improve their capacity for protection and mitigation.

We are helping States Parties to build capabilities for effective emergency response. The setting up of a Rapid Response and Assistance Mission (RRAM) is now an important part of our progress in the implementation of Article X of the Convention. The RRAM is envisaged to be deployed upon possible requests from our members for emergency measures of assistance in the case of use of chemical weapons.

Iran, given its own tragic experience is especially active and supportive in this area as evident from the Regional Basic Training Course on Assistance and Protection that successfully concluded yesterday. An essential component of the framework for prevention is effective domestic legislation and enforcement of the rules of the Convention within national jurisdictions. The establishment and enforcement of administrative and legal measures as required under the Convention is not only legally necessary but practically essential as part of any effective counter-terrorism strategy.

Measures covering systematic declarations, industry monitoring, controls on transfers of chemicals, and regulatory regimes to identify and track toxic chemicals should be reviewed by all States Parties in order to strengthen these further. The Secretariat will continue to invest resources in assisting States Parties to fulfil their national implementation obligations. Monitoring and inspection activities cannot cover the entire global chemical industry given its scope and scale. To augment these efforts and to strengthen the global norm against chemical weapons we must expand our engagement and outreach. In this way, we increase awareness about the work of the Organisation, and nurture a culture of responsible science in our research institutions, universities, and in our schools.

We have 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 is guiding the 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 global prohibition on chemical weapons illustrates the vast possibilities of multilateral cooperation for common causes. The Convention and the work of the OPCW demonstrate what can be achieved provided we remain steadfast in supporting global norms for the common good. The achievements of the OPCW are the result of an extraordinary spirit of cooperation and consensus consistently shown by our States Parties. The Convention not only serves our immediate security interests but contributes significantly to the building of a peaceful and humane world for future generations.

We all have a shared vision. We must continue to demonstrate a strong commitment to realise that vision and make the norms of the Convention inviolable. This is critical in order for us to emerge successful from the challenges the Organisation currently faces. We must continue to work tirelessly to convince each and every country to join the Convention. Our work to completely eliminate the declared stockpiles of chemical weapons from the world will continue until this objective is accomplished. At the same time we need to reflect closely and work cooperatively to ensure that we have all the tools at our disposal to prevent their re-emergence in any form.

The Chemical Weapons Convention represents the collective resolve of the international community to bring an end to a terrible legacy. Today in commemorating two important

anniversaries, let us reinforce our commitment to both the letter and the spirit of the Convention and redouble our efforts for a world free from the threat of chemical weapons.

Thank you.
