



ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

“OPCW’s Role in New International Security Scenarios: the Syrian Experience”

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REMARKS AS DELIVERED

[Hosts]

[Excellencies]

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to speak to you on a topic that is at once current and of abiding interest. But allow me first to thank the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for this opportunity. Needless to say how pleased I am to be in Chile – a country that has remained steadfast in its support for the noble goals of global peace and security.

This positive outlook and commitment to contribute has translated consistently in Chile’s strong support for the aims of the Chemical Weapons Convention and its active and constructive role at the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). Durable structures of global governance that enable all nations to live and prosper under conditions of peace and security are what we all aim for. While this is a process that continues to advance in stages, it is incumbent upon us to protect and to preserve the gains already made. This is the aim of our multilateral endeavours of which OPCW is a part.

Although the essential framework for an international order seeking peace and opportunities for progress exists, our ability to craft effective collective responses to new global challenges is dependent on political will and commitment. There is also the element of unprecedented complexity of modern life which has brought the gift of mutually beneficial interdependence. However, we must strive to ensure that the gains of science, technology, trade and multilateralism are evenly shared and ethical norms are further strengthened.

Every complexity can be broken down into its simpler constituent elements. Our present day international order is no different. And it is in those fundamental building blocks that make up our intricate international system that we will begin to find answers to our most difficult questions. Our Organisation and its work is part and parcel of this international system occupying an area that is relevant to not only disarmament but also to the aspiration to promote humanitarian ideals. It is a segment of an architecture whose foundations were established after bitter historical experiences and amidst the wreckage of two world wars in the last century.

The destruction of life and the ravages of those conflicts are almost beyond description. The lessons that were learnt and applied are not. They are part of our legacy and today they enable us to function as a global community. The key lessons the world had learnt were to restore age old norms and values as a basis for inter-state conduct; a resolve to live in peace and prevent war through a system of collective security; to elevate human dignity; and to work together for justice and equality. In short; to usher in a new era of peace and security.

We all know that assurances of peace are unattainable without addressing the problem of weapons of mass destruction. The First World War had already shown the devastation of chemical weapons. The shortcomings of the legal framework of the time needed to be addressed to prevent a far greater carnage that modern chemical weapons could unleash. In an age of specialisation, it had become necessary to deal with different categories of weapons in a differentiated manner. In the industrial age, the cost of breaches was incalculable. Assurances of compliance needed measures for verification.

Of a number of treaties and agreements that came into being in the last 70 years or so the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) is the most far reaching in its scope and application as it represents a total and verifiable ban on chemical weapons. Today when we examine the role of the OPCW in dealing with new international security scenarios, it is important to do so in the perspective of the lessons of history and our experience in implementing the Convention over the last twenty years.

Under this perspective, the preservation of the norm is critical because when it is breached without accountability, impunity is born. It is also vital to preserve the system that offers assurances of compliance because a loss of confidence in the effectiveness or relevance of the mechanism can only lead to the erosion of the entire framework. 20 years after the Convention entered into force, we can all feel proud of what has been accomplished. Looking ahead, there are a number of reasons warranting serious deliberation. Science and technology have advanced. The OPCW has dealt with some extraordinary situations that few could have anticipated at the time the Convention was drafted. And while I wish to avoid the cliché that the Convention might become a victim of its own success, there is certainly a need to avoid complacency that success can engender.

Allow me to discuss each of these factors for it is through the consideration of these elements that we will forge a future for the OPCW in a manner where the Organisation remains able to deal with new challenges and is responsive to international security and peace objectives.

Our balance sheet must start with the contribution that the Convention has made in advancing international law and bringing tangible benefits of disarmament. Against a long and tragic history of use of chemical weapons, 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 had finally become a reality. The Convention emerged as the first multilateral treaty that bans an entire class of weapons of mass destruction under international verification.

The Convention makes no exceptions in prohibiting the possession of chemical weapons. All States Parties have equal rights and obligations, and those who possess chemical weapons must destroy their stockpiles. States Parties are also required to ensure that, within their jurisdiction, chemistry is only used for peaceful purposes. The total quantity of chemical warfare agents declared to the OPCW amounted to over 72,000 tonnes. 96% of these weapons have already been destroyed under verification by the OPCW. This is an historic achievement recognized by the Nobel Peace Prize Committee in 2013. The OPCW was awarded the Peace Prize for its extensive efforts in chemical disarmament.

The stockpiles of chemical weapons represent large quantities of highly lethal substances. Destroying them is dangerous, time-consuming and expensive. 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 in Russia very soon and in the United States by the year 2023.

All countries with chemical plants that are regarded as capable under the Convention, must allow inspections by the OPCW in order to verify that the production or consumption of relevant chemicals and precursors is only for legitimate activities. In this context, the Organisation has conducted nearly 3500 industry inspections. The Convention has also established a challenge-inspection mechanism which is significant for its deterrent value and as a verification tool to address well founded concerns about non-compliance. The Secretariat has steadily enhanced its readiness to conduct such an inspection should a State Party ever request it.

The pride of our enterprise is its multilateral character representing a unity of purpose within the diversity of our membership. Amongst them are countries with advanced chemical industry as well as those with hardly any. There is a broad range of countries whose economies are developing or in transition. Disarmament and non-proliferation are the two pillars of the Convention that serve the core security interests of our entire membership. The other two pillars are international cooperation, and, assistance and protection against chemical weapons.

While multilateral disarmament is often hampered by tensions between non-proliferation objectives and promotional efforts, our international cooperation activities at the OPCW, have engendered a sense of ownership across our membership. This has been crucial in maintaining goodwill and consensus. The OPCW 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 enhancement 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. In case of a chemical weapons attack, or threat of attack, States Parties can also call upon the OPCW's newly established Rapid Response Assistance Mission (RRAM) capabilities. These are in broad terms the core activities that have been steadily carried out over two decades and represent the implementation of the Convention in pursuit of its goal to stamp out the evil of chemical weapons from the world in a multilateral and cooperative framework.

In the course of our service to the international community, we have encountered extraordinary situations. Our work in Syria is an example of both the Organisation's adaptability, and the international community's commitment to uniting when needed in the cause of eradicating chemical weapons. Despite the long strides we have taken towards their abolition in August of 2013, the world witnessed the shocking spectacle of victims of a chemical attack brutally unleashed on Ghouta - a densely populated suburb of Damascus.

Those attacks set in motion a series of events that culminated in Syria's decision to accede to the Convention. That step helped diffuse what seemed like a major international crisis. Syria joined the Convention following an agreement negotiated in Geneva by the Russian Federation and the United States in September 2013.

On 27 September, the OPCW Executive Council adopted a decision on the elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme. This decision was endorsed by United Nations Security Council resolution 2118 (2013) on the same day. Given the on-going armed conflict, an accelerated programme of destruction of the Syria chemical weapons was established by the Executive Council. This represented an unprecedented challenge for the OPCW which was required to operate in an active war zone in order to oversee the destruction of a major chemical weapons programme and to do so with ambitious target dates.

Within days of these decisions, our inspectors were deployed. Following consultations with the UN Secretary-General, we announced the establishment of an OPCW-UN Joint Mission to oversee the implementation of the disarmament programme in Syria. The crucial initial tasks were successfully completed within a months' time. These included providing assistance to the Syrian Arab Republic in submitting the initial declaration of its chemical weapons programme, verifying chemical weapons production and storage sites and completing the functional destruction of chemical weapons production, mixing and filling facilities. With the support of the UN, the European Union and more than 30 of our Member States, the bulk of chemical weapons material was removed from Syria and destroyed outside its territory.

The destruction of chemicals removed from Syria occurred at commercial chemical disposal facilities located in different Member States. The services of these companies were acquired through a process of international tenders. These chemicals included binary chemical weapon components and associated reaction masses.

The Syria mission tested the organisation's responsiveness to contingencies, and set a new operational paradigm for our work. We found ourselves navigating uncharted waters; undertaking new activities that stretched the limits of our organisational capacities as well as the resilience of the Convention. This unprecedented mission also provided us with new and novel approaches that can be applied elsewhere in the future.

In 2014, I established a Fact-Finding Mission to investigate allegations of use of chemical weapons in Syria. Since that time, several missions have been deployed to look into various incidents that were reported to involve the use of toxic chemicals as weapons. 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 another terrible incident at Khan Shaykhun in early April this year confirmed that it was indeed an attack involving the use of sarin as a chemical weapon.

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). The work of the JIM has become highly important in identifying the perpetrators of this horrific attack. After an armed attack on our FFM in May 2014, we were obliged to adapt rather than abort. Clearly the choice was between no investigations at all or investigations that would apply procedures and methods suited to the difficult conditions that we were dealing with in conflict zones. Inaction was not an option. It would only encourage the perpetrators and cause irreparable damage to the Convention and its objectives.

After the elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme under the most compressed of timelines, the work of the FFM has demonstrated that our adaptability was crucial to address new and unprecedented situations in order to serve the object and purpose of the Convention. 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. It is on account of such acknowledgment of the work of the OPCW Fact Finding Mission that the Security Council proceeded to establish the Joint Investigative Mechanism to identify the perpetrators of the attacks.

Another crucial aspect of our on-going work in Syria and one that has a direct bearing on preserving the integrity of the Convention is to clarify certain elements of the Syria's declaration of its chemical weapons programme. A team of experts called the Declaration Assessment Team has been engaged since April 2014 with Syria in an effort to resolve several outstanding issues. We aim 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. This is possible through the provision of scientifically and technically plausible explanations on the unresolved questions.

We cannot but seek to ensure that the provisions of the Convention and those of the various decisions of the Executive Council and the UN Security Council are fully implemented in Syria. At the same time the mechanisms created to resolve issues as these emerged also serve to

highlight the ability of the CWC regime to deal with unexpected contingencies. When considering the longer term, the ability to continue to effectively respond to contingencies will not be the only challenge for us.

There was a time when 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 aggression involving chemical weapons. We know from recent developments that there is, however, no room for complacency. Chemical weapons have continued to be used.

Despite our progress across the board, it does not in itself guarantee that breaches will not occur. We have to continually and consciously work to make the norm against chemical weapons truly universal and enduring. The motto of our Organisation is ‘working together for a world free from chemical weapons’. A significant 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.

With the exception of South Sudan which is actively considering its membership, 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.

While we have steadily progressed in our journey towards a world free of chemical weapons and in the process successfully negotiated demanding challenges, the tasks ahead require no less 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 the priority will shift to preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons. This is an objective which is multifaceted and of permanent value. It requires investment of financial, technical and diplomatic resources.

A key factor that influences the implementation of the Convention is science. Science and technology, and chemistry in particular, have a transforming and positive influence on our world. However, history demonstrates the ability of science to invent ever more destructive weapons and technologies. The ban on chemical weapons is permanent. To keep it effective, our future priorities include strengthening national implementation with special attention to concerns about terrorism, monitoring developments in science and their impact on the Convention, engaging the scientific communities and promoting wider outreach and education.

We seek to continue our progress by consolidating our gains; ensuring effective implementation of the Convention globally and by making the OPCW a global repository of knowledge and expertise with regard to chemical weapons. The effectiveness, credibility and confidence in our verification regime will remain at the heart of the Convention. And, its relevance will only increase in importance in the future as the Organisation shifts its focus from destroying chemical weapons to preventing their re-emergence.

We will continue to look at how we can make the best use of the knowledge, and expertise that we have developed over the past twenty years. In doing so, we need to keep abreast of developments in science and technology.

The OPCW Scientific Advisory Board plays a vital role in assuring that developments in science and technology are taken into consideration by the OPCW. Given our recent experience in Syria, I have 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. This Group will identify the capabilities, skill sets and equipment needed to augment and strengthen the Secretariat's capacities in this area.

The ability to detect the presence of chemical warfare agents through effective sample collection and analytical methods will be crucial to the Organisation's role in dealing with contingencies. The OPCW Laboratory and our network of designated labs are vital elements in this investigative capability. The laboratories offer the necessary assurance to our States Parties that the chemical analyses needed to make determinations, or to clarify issues occurring during OPCW inspections are carried out competently and with unambiguous results.

I have recently commissioned an initiative seeking to upgrade 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. The OPCW Laboratory is under this initiative envisaged to be expanded and bolstered with additional capabilities benefiting from recent advances in S&T. The success of this initiative would depend on extra-budgetary financial support.

While stockpiles of weapons diminish, the threat of chemical terrorism is rising. Although the production and use of chemical weapons by States has become less likely, non-state-actors are now a major concern. We have already seen that non-state-actors are willing and capable of obtaining and using chemical weapons. It is not difficult to imagine the impact of an attack against a large chemical facility, or the casualties that would result from the release of nerve agent in a crowded city.

To counter these threats, the OPCW is working with its Member States to improve their capacity to protect against such attacks and to mitigate their impact. The Open-ended Working Group on Terrorism and its Sub Working Group provide a platform to exchange views, share best practices and develop recommendations for the consideration of States Parties. Furthermore the OPCW TS is helping States Parties to build capabilities for effective emergency response. The Rapid Response Assistance Mission (RRAM) that I mentioned earlier is part of our assistance and protection programmes and can be deployed at short notice, upon request, to States Parties under chemical terrorist attack.

An essential component of the framework for prevention is effective domestic legislation and enforcement of the rules of the Convention within domestic jurisdictions. The Convention requires that all States Parties establish and reinforce administrative and legislative measures so that key provisions of the Convention are in force within their jurisdictions. These include the requirement for systematic declarations, industry monitoring, controls on transfers of chemicals,

and regulatory measures to identify and track toxic chemicals. 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 are expanding 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 contribution that the CWC and the work of the OPCW have made to international peace and security is substantial. And even though the norm has recently been challenged, the international community has reacted with resolve to condemn it. We are also aware that the international system designed to enable nations to exist in conditions of peace and with opportunities for progress cannot be taken for granted. We have to work consistently to support and to strengthen it in the interest of global peace and security.

No one can predict the future. But we can prepare ourselves to deal with its uncertainties. We have accumulated a wealth of experience and a reservoir of goodwill. We have also identified the specific areas where we need to work to strengthen the ability to the Organisation with a view to future challenges. What we need now is to get down to work to reshape the Organisation for its prospective role – a role that remains indispensable in our collective pursuit of world peace and prosperity.

We cannot afford the old habit of searching for peace after the trauma of war and trying to build something new all over again. We have the means and the mechanisms that have proved their worth and effectiveness. We have built institutions and processes for dialogue and cooperation. We must strengthen them and use them to the fullest. By fortifying the multilateral model and agreed upon norms, we can build a better more secure future.

Thank you.
