



ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

**Meeting of States Parties of the Biological and Toxins Weapons Convention
Statement by Mr. Hamid Ali Rao, Deputy Director-General of the OPCW**

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Geneva, Switzerland

REMARKS AS DELIVERED

Mr Chairman,

Let me join others and congratulate you on your election as Chairperson of this Meeting of States Parties of the BTWC. Having worked with you closely for several years, I am confident that with your deep understanding and knowledge of the BTWC and well-honed diplomatic skills you will ensure a successful outcome of this meeting for the benefit of all.

This Meeting of States Parties, the first to follow the BWC's Eighth Review Conference, takes place as the OPCW concludes a year commemorating its 20th anniversary. This has been an opportunity to reflect on the successes and lessons from the past, and to consider current and future challenges to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). Of critical importance to meeting these challenges will be the Fourth Review Conference of the CWC, which will take place in 2018.

While we will continue to be guided by our motto 'Working Together for a World Free of Chemical Weapons', some re-ordering of the Organisation's priorities can be expected. Doing so will better prepare the OPCW to prevent the re-emergence of chemical weapons and strengthen its responsiveness to new threats. Implementation of the CWC espouses a collective determination to strengthen international security; yet any Convention is only as strong as our continued will to see it upheld. For the CWC, this will continue to be tested, with reports that chemical weapons persist in being used. Furthermore, the CWC is being confronted by issues unforeseen at the time that it entered into force. Today, the prospect of terrorists using chemical agents is no longer a theoretical possibility. And in a world of regional and international trade integration, global chemical industries, unprecedented technological evolution, and a highly dynamic security environment, potential new challenges will continually arise.

Mr Chairman,

We continue to benefit from the wisdom of those who drafted the Chemical Weapons Conventions. They embedded into the treaty the capacity to maintain its relevance for generations to come. The articles of our Convention make available to us tools that can be employed to counter emerging threats. Responding to new concerns within an often uncertain security environment requires recognition of what these tools are and finding innovative ways to use them. One of these new concerns that demand our attention is the fundamental risk to our Convention posed by non-state actors. The OPCW has been working to address the challenge of chemical terrorism. An Open-Ended Working Group on Terrorism and its Sub-Working Group on Non-State Actors continues to provide fora for States Parties to hear from international experts and to exchange views on what more the OPCW could do to contribute to global counter-terrorism efforts. In May 2016, the OPCW also established a Rapid Response and Assistance Mission, otherwise known as ‘the RRAM’, to provide emergency measures of assistance, upon request, to States Parties that may not have the capacity to respond effectively to a chemical terrorism attack.

At the Eighty-Sixth Session of OPCW’s Executive Council this past October, the States Parties of the CWC demonstrated their commitment to preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons and to responding to this key security challenge with the adoption of a decision entitled, ‘Addressing the Threat Posed by the Use of Chemical Weapons by non-State actors’. This decision underlines the OPCW’s role in countering this threat, and it is important for the security of our States Parties and our Organisation’s future. Our Council’s decision in October made clear that States Parties are seeking further support – both in coordination and in capacity-building – to prevent and respond to the non-state actor threat. Strengthening global chemical security and ensuring that toxic chemicals do not fall into the wrong hands is one of the most important ways that the OPCW and its Member States can curb the risks of chemical terrorism. To this end, in September of this year, the OPCW convened an Expert Workshop on Chemical Security to better coordinate international efforts in this critical area.

As the threat of terrorism cannot be addressed by States Parties or inter-governmental organisations in isolation, we must actively engage in and promote interagency cooperation. Consequently, the OPCW has been working with the United Nations and others with interests in areas of common concern. Within the framework of the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force, the OPCW also co-chairs with the IAEA the Working Group on Preventing and Responding to WMD Terrorist Attacks. In line with these efforts, in early 2017 a table-top exercise was held at the OPCW Headquarters involving the RRAM and 14 other key international organizations, including the BWC-ISU. The focus of this exercise was placed squarely on enhancing inter-agency interoperability and communications in the event of a chemical or biological attack.

As a result of the table-top exercise, a number of recommendations have been produced which the Working Group on Preventing and Responding to WMD Terrorist Attacks will be taking forward in its next phase of work. The OPCW is also pleased to share its lessons learned and experiences in responding to chemical weapons attacks with the BWC-ISU for its own initiative related to ‘Strengthening global mechanisms and capacities for responding to deliberate use of

biological agents.’ Clearly the OPCW’s capacity-building portfolio goes beyond just strengthening assistance mechanisms. Rather, it covers a whole range of international cooperation activities aiming to enhance national implementation of the Convention and to foster the peaceful uses of chemistry. The OPCW Technical Secretariat has for the past 20 years undertaken numerous programs and projects that support these important goals of the Convention. These include, among others, an internship programme for legal drafters and National Authority representatives, training courses on Article VI declarations, inspections obligations, analytical skills development courses, and our flagship Associate Program.

The National Authorities in OPCW Member States play a crucial role as enablers of national implementation of the Convention and of outreach to relevant stakeholders at the domestic level. To this end, we convene an annual meeting of National Authorities in The Hague in addition to annual regional meetings of National Authorities. These provide important venues for the exchange of relevant information on implementation of the Convention and the sharing of views in areas of common interest.

Mr. Chairman,

The chemical industry has always been an essential partner for the OPCW. In this regard, the cooperation that the Organisation enjoys with industry has become ever more important in light of the necessity to strengthen chemical security. In 2017, representatives of the chemical industry participated in OPCW events that covered the salient issues of chemical safety and security, education and outreach, science and technology, and verification. This year’s annual meeting of National Authorities to the CWC included a dedicated segment on industry engagement, through which representatives of the chemical industry and the National Authorities exchanged views on common interests.

To strengthen the effectiveness of our work, engagement with broader communities of stakeholders is essential for fostering cooperation and enhancing learning opportunities. In view of this, the OPCW’s Advisory Board on Education and Outreach is preparing a detailed report on education and outreach theory and practice of relevance to the Organisation. Their advice will serve to bolster our activities in stakeholder engagement. Science and technology is an area of commonality, where our Conventions find overlap in their scientific underpinnings – biology does not exist without the underlying chemistry of life processes. This scientific fact compels us to fortify our scientific literacy. We so-often speak of the rapid pace of scientific advances, the diffusion and globalisation of scientific knowledge, and the potential threats this may bring. Yet, we must not lose sight of the reality that the chemical agents which have been confirmed as being used today – sarin, chlorine, and sulfur mustard – were developed for combat before even the Second World War. Thus, our consideration of scientific developments must do more than just focus on worst case scenarios involving cutting-edge science and technology, but also recognise the contributions that such developments can make to international cooperation and assistance efforts. Against this backdrop, the OPCW’s Scientific Advisory Board is now drafting its report on developments in science and technology for the Fourth Review Conference. A key aspect of their review has been the recognition that emerging and practical applications of new and innovative technologies – in both research and industrial sectors – as well as the repurposing of existing technologies for unanticipated new applications, benefits from increasingly

transdisciplinary scientific communities. As disarmament stakeholders consider the impact of technological change, it is vital to engage with broad scientific communities and consider technology-based opportunities that support disarmament objectives. This message cannot be overstated, since we must take advantage of these opportunities to ensure our capabilities remain fit for purpose. In this respect, we view the concept of scientific convergence as a chance to harness technological change.

The OPCW's efforts to maintain technical relevance and to draw on advice from its Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) have revolved around several initiatives. These include launching a biomedical proficiency testing programme and the holding of protein biotoxin exercises at the OPCW Laboratory; incorporating lessons learned from contingency operations into inspector training exercises; and the commencement of a project to expand and upgrade the OPCW Laboratory to a Centre for Chemistry and Technology. Additionally, SAB has formed a temporary working group on investigative science and technology that will provide recommendations and advice on the use of technologies that benefit laboratory methods, contingency operations, and assistance missions. To effectively inject scientific advice into policy decision-making requires that advice be practical and relevant. Scientific advice also serves to question assumptions, introduce innovative ideas, and stimulate discussion. From the experience of the OPCW's Scientific Advisory Board, States Parties may not always act on advice, but delegations are better served and decision making is better informed through its consideration.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

With the completion of destruction of the chemical weapons stockpile in the Russian Federation this past September, we move ever-closer to a world free of chemical weapons. Going forward, we must remain vigilant and work with renewed determination and understanding of what will be required to preserve our Convention as an international norm against chemical weapons well into the future. International security faces many challenges that will require innovative solutions. Exchanging ideas and sharing our experiences and best practices in chemical and biological security, the convergence of the sciences and the promotion of norms against weapons of mass destruction, grant us an opportunity to nurture innovation in disarmament. Such activities ultimately strengthen our respective treaty regimes and ensure they remain strong far into the future. I wish you every success for this Meeting of States Parties.
