



ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Conference

The CWC after the Fourth Review Conference

Keynote Speech by the Director-General of the OPCW, Fernando Arias

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REMARKS AS DELIVERED

Mr Chair,
Distinguished participants,

I want to start by thanking the Istituto Affari Internazionali for organising this conference on behalf of the EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Consortium.

Thank you for inviting me. I welcome this opportunity to meet with friends and prominent leaders in the field of disarmament, non-proliferation, non re-emergence, and international security. The OPCW and the EU have fostered a close and collaborative partnership for many years now and I commend the EU for its sponsorship of this event.

The topic of “The CWC after the Fourth Review Conference,” is a well-chosen and timely one, as the Review Conference concluded less than a month ago.

When the Convention entered into force in 1997, it represented the rare convergence of common interest and political will to solve a long-standing security issue. Since then, undeniably, important strides have been made towards a world free of chemical weapons through the work of the OPCW to implement the CWC.

Over 96 percent of 72,000 metric tonnes of declared warfare agents have been destroyed under strict international verification overseen by the OPCW. 193 countries are now party to the CWC, making it the most universal disarmament-related treaty in the world.

Global confidence in the effectiveness of chemical disarmament is buttressed by one of the most extensive verification regimes ever implemented. The Secretariat has diligently carried out thousands of inspections of declared facilities around the world to assure treaty compliance and participate to global security.

For this the OPCW was awarded the high accolade of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2013.

However, over the past five years, increasing pressure has been mounting on the international norm against the use of chemical weapons—the very core of the Convention. We have all witnessed violation after violation of this norm in Syria, in Iraq, in Malaysia and in the United Kingdom.

It was against this backdrop that the Fourth Review Conference conducted its deliberations and endeavoured to provide further guidance for the OPCW's future. Commitment to the norm and continued implementation of the CWC was renewed. Common ground was also found on numerous important issues such as strengthening the verification regime and enhancing capacity-development.

I expect that States Parties will build on the review process and follow up deliberations in the policy-making organs. At the same time, the Secretariat will continue to implement the Convention according to its mandate and all the decisions adopted by the policy-making organs. These will serve to lead and shape the development of the OPCW as it evolves and adapts to the new challenges.

Addressing the re-emergence of chemical weapons use is now one of the crucial defining tests of the OPCW. Identification of the perpetrators of chemical weapons use will be an important factor to deterring further use. Since 2014, the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission has been investigating allegations of such use in Syria.

It is regrettable that the UN Security Council was not able to extend the mandate of the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism last year. In June, however, a Special Conference of the States Parties to the CWC was convened and a decision was taken to address the chemical weapons threat.

This decision requests the Secretariat to put in place arrangements to identify perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons in Syria. The Secretariat has been working set up a team and the expertise needed to fulfil this mission. The adoption of the OPCW's 2019 budget was instrumental in facilitating the implementation of the decision by guaranteeing financial and other resources.

But the decision goes beyond the Syrian Arab Republic. The Secretariat has also submitted proposals, pursuant to the above mentioned decision, for the provision of technical expertise to any State Party requesting assistance for investigations into chemical weapons use.

The June decision broke new ground and strengthened the foundations of existing endeavours to strengthen assistance to States parties in the prevention of chemical terrorism. Non-State actors and chemical terrorism are a real danger, and the decision adopted by the Executive Council October 2017 reinforces the OPCW's role in this context.

Through the Rapid Response and Assistance Mission (RRAM), the Secretariat is able to extend prompt emergency response aid upon a State Party's request.

At the same time, comprehensive and effective national implementation legislation is essential for adequately dealing with such threats. Criminalising activities prohibited by the CWC and enforcing those rules is the best restraint against the proliferation, or re-emergence.

The Secretariat has also been steadily forging closer ties with other international organisations, especially the United Nations.

Effectively confronting chemical weapons use also requires the Organisation to persist in its universality activities. As long as one country remains outside the Convention, there is a strong proliferation risk. Engaging those countries that have yet to join the Convention is still a priority.

In our future missions, we will also have to deal with the progress in science and technology as it presents hurdles as well as opportunities for the Organisation. The OPCW has recently launched a project to upgrade the OPCW Laboratory to help the Organisation keep up to date with the rapid developments and breakthroughs in science. The construction of a new "Centre for Chemistry and Technology" will bolster the chemical analysis capabilities of the OPCW and further strengthen the verification regime and extensive training programmes for States Parties. There is a strong expectation of the State Parties for the Secretariat to keep up its support for developing national response capabilities and systems.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The OPCW intends to and certainly must persevere in its important mission of ridding the world of chemical weapons. Careful monitoring of the elimination of the remaining chemical weapons will go on. Industrial inspections shall go on. Our new mission to investigate and identify perpetrators of chemical weapon use will be carried out as required. And the Secretariat will continue to assist States Parties in implementing their obligations under the Convention.

The Review Conference highlighted that there are still considerable challenges on the long path to ensuring the world is free from the threat of chemical weapons. On that journey, the OPCW has an indispensable role to play as the international authority for seeking solutions and strengthening the norm against this outlawed weapon.

I thank you for your attention.
