



Statement by the Director-General of the OPCW, Fernando Arias, at the 13th CBRNe Protection Symposium

As delivered on 24 September 2019, Malmö, Sweden

Distinguished Authorities and Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to address you at the 13th CBRNe Protection Symposium. I commend the Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI) for organising this important event. I also wish to thank Sweden for its strong and unwavering commitment to the goals of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

My presence at this event underlines the fact that protection and prohibition are the two sides of the same coin. The objectives are convergent. The common quest remains effective security against the threat of weapons of mass destruction. The threats are not static. Our responses also need to be dynamic. No single approach affords assurance on its own.

We need to continually review and develop complementary regimes. The Chemical Weapons Convention represents the surest defence against chemical weapons, and provides the essential legal foundation. This international treaty seeks to eliminate the threat at its root. It is comprehensive. It is an objective with a long uneven history until 1997.

That year, 1997, a total and global prohibition on chemical weapons came into effect. The Convention also created the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to oversee its implementation. Over the next 22 years, steady progress has been made in implementing all provisions of the Convention. Verified destruction of chemical weapons represents the most concrete manifestation of success. Over 97% of the more than 70,000 tonnes of declared stockpiles have been destroyed. This progress alone makes a significant contribution to global peace and security, recognised with the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to the Organisation in 2013. With nearly all these weapons eliminated, the world is a much safer place. The remaining small percentage is expected to be destroyed by the year 2023.

The CWC is however much more than a treaty that eliminates declared chemical weapons. In its 22 years of existence, the OPCW has been engaged in a multiplicity of tasks. Despite their variety, they are all geared towards strengthening the prohibition and supporting international efforts at prevention.

Apart from extensive verification of destruction, thousands of inspections have been carried out in the chemical industry. In addition, good practices have been established to prevent the re-emergence of chemical weapons. These include the:

- monitoring of transfers,
- encouraging the joining of the Convention by States,
- 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.

Concrete progress towards pre-defined goals has been notable. Dealing with new uncertainties, challenges and risks now has to take centre-stage. The core objective is to ensure that the global prohibition against chemical weapons does not weaken in face of new threats. Such threats are real. Recent events have highlighted that complacency cannot be an option.

Chemical weapons have been used more than once in the civil war in Syria. This, despite the fact that a tremendous amount of work, financial resources and effort was invested in eliminating the Syrian chemical weapons programme.

In August 2013, the world community stood in shock. Sarin was used in Syria to devastating effect in the civilian neighbourhood of Ghouta, an area just outside Damascus. Many people died, many others were injured. Outrage followed. An international armed conflict seemed unavoidable. The Russian Federation and the United States cooperated to defuse the situation. Syria opted to join the CWC thereby committing to the elimination of its chemical weapons programme. This was accomplished in a relatively short period of time. Within weeks, the capacity in Syria to produce chemical weapons was functionally disabled. The related facilities were subsequently destroyed.

In the meantime, an unprecedented programme removed the chemical weapons and precursors from the territory of Syria. These were destroyed, at sea, on board of a specially equipped marine vessel, called the Cape Ray, provided by the United States. Several countries (Denmark, Finland, Germany, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Spain) participated in the maritime transportation and security operation. Chemicals removed from Syria that posed a lesser risk were processed at commercial disposal facilities in a number of countries. The OPCW and the United Nations accomplished this highly complex mission jointly.

I recall this recent accomplishment as a testament to the value of international unity. The most difficult missions become attainable when international institutions abide by their mandates and are allowed to function to their fullest.

Despite all the progress, chemical weapons have re-emerged as a serious threat. There have been several incidents of use in Syria including by terrorists, who also used them in Iraq. A shocking incidence occurred at the Kuala Lumpur International airport in February 2017.

Then, in March 2018, there were two people attacked in Salisbury (United Kingdom) with a deadly nerve agent. The world was shocked. Until then, the very existence of this extremely toxic chemical had only been speculated. Only milligrams of this chemical agent were used. But the consequences were enormous.

These incidents clearly illustrate how the global security environment which we live in has considerably changed since the entry into force of the Convention in 1997. The question naturally is what it would take for the OPCW to remain relevant to the needs and challenges of today and in the future.

The legal framework of the Convention remains as valid as it was 22 years ago. The steady growth in the number of countries accepting the Convention has led to a point where only 4 countries remain outside it. Today, 193 nations are States Parties to the Convention, meaning that 98% of the world's population live under its protection. We must continue to make a strong case for Egypt, Israel, North Korea and South Sudan to join the Convention.

During the present period the adaptation of the Organisation needs to be done. The successful elimination of the last of the declared chemical weapons will be a historic attainment. But it will not mark the end of our mission. We cannot afford to lower our guard against the re-emergence of chemical weapons.

I want to underline chemical weapons are not only missiles, munitions, rockets or containers full of toxic chemicals. A chemical weapon is any kind of toxic chemical and its precursor and any device or munition especially designed to cause death or harm through the toxic properties of the chemicals it contains; and also a chemical weapon is any equipment especially designed for use in connection with the munitions and devices above mentioned. It means that a little box with milligrams of a deadly agent is a chemical weapon. That is why we will need to remain vigilant against threats, old and new.

Dangerous chemicals are produced and frequently used in the modern economy, and we need to ensure that they remain used solely for peaceful purposes. In the evolving scenario, our first focus of attention has to be on science and technology. Advances in the field promise a better future. They will however inevitably impact the verification activities of the Organisation, for instance, in the chemical industry, where technology and engineering are rapidly transforming the systems of production. We must have the ability to detect new chemicals and establish if they are relevant to the Convention.

A deeper understanding of the growing interaction between chemistry and biology is also essential. This convergence gives rise to the ability to produce potentially dangerous chemicals through new techniques. The OPCW has an active Scientific Advisory Board (SAB). This is an independent advisory body that provides scientific and technical advice and helps us keep abreast of new developments. This includes advances in the tools and methods available for assistance, as well as protection from chemical exposure. It has recently conducted reviews on protective equipment, technologies for early warning of chemical exposure, medical countermeasures, remote sensing, unmanned systems, etc.

We are also creating in The Hague a centre of excellence. The OPCW Chemical Laboratory is being upgraded to a Centre for Chemistry and Technology (ChemTech Centre). The Centre will be composed of a world class lab and a section devoted to International Cooperation and Research. Through voluntary contributions from our States Parties, construction of the new facility is being financed.

To illustrate the importance of this project, one needs to consider just the incident in Salisbury. OPCW Technical Assistance was requested by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in the wake of the Salisbury incident in March 2018. The OPCW team worked independently and was not involved in the national investigation by the British authorities. It collected environmental and biomedical samples. These were analysed

at four OPCW designated laboratories. The results of the OPCW analysis confirmed the findings of the United Kingdom relating to the identity of the toxic chemical.

The real magnitude and implications of the Salisbury incident are difficult to calibrate. The horrific effects and the extent of contamination in Salisbury from milligrams of a substance sounds like fiction. It took almost a year for the UK authorities to certify decontamination of the area. Nearly a million pounds sterling were spent to replace the ambulance and police vehicles that were involved in the response, and that had to be destroyed. Nearly 13000 hours were spent on the clean-up operations. The total cost of the effort is estimated to be a staggering 30 million pounds.

An extremely toxic chemical nerve agent was used in Salisbury which was outside the scope of the OPCW verification regime. The OPCW Member States have moved to plug this loophole. Additional families of chemicals are to be considered by the Conference of the States Parties at its next session in November to be included into Schedule 1 of the Convention. Schedule 1 is a listing of the most dangerous chemicals. These are subject to verification by the OPCW.

The incident highlights the need for our skills, training and analytical abilities to keep pace with developments in science and technology. The new ChemTech Centre I have mentioned will go a long way in addressing this necessity. Additionally, the Centre will sponsor capacity building opportunities for Member States. Joint research with the participation of scientists of the States Parties into topics of relevance will be one of its core functions.

The laboratory that the new Centre will have will allow the high standard in the verification activities that the Organisation carries out. This will mean a significant confidence building measure when the verification is carried out in the global chemical industry. Its purpose is not rooted in a presumption of suspicion. The global chemical industry is fully supportive and worthy of praise for its cooperation. The inspections verify that the production and use of chemicals and precursors is only for legitimate activities.

Since its inception, the Organisation has conducted over 3600 industry inspections to verify that the production and consumption of chemicals are intended for solely peaceful purposes. Today, the global chemical industry is growing. States Parties have declared over 5,300 chemical production facilities, which are producing an ever wider range of new compounds. Naturally, monitoring and inspection activities cannot cover the entire global chemical industry. A risk-based approach is essential, which is what we do. The purpose would be to ensure that dangerous dual-use chemicals are properly used in the chemical industry.

Moreover, the CWC offers to its States Parties several avenues of international cooperation. These relate to both peaceful uses of chemistry and assistance and protection against the threat of chemical weapons. Countries joining the CWC are assured of every possible support in situations where they might become victims of a chemical weapons attack. As part of such preparedness, a Rapid Response and Assistance Mission can be deployed by the OPCW upon possible requests from our members.

We also conduct a range of capacity building initiatives aimed at improving States Parties ability to prepare for and respond to emergencies involving toxic chemicals. These initiatives cover the full spectrum of chemical emergency management, operational and strategic. At the

operational level - in the form of practical training courses co-organised with training partners around the world. The focus is put on medical management, detection, identification, monitoring and sampling.

At the strategic level, activities involve emergency planning and coordination projects. Capacity building programmes include regional full-training cycles, table-top exercises, specialised training such as live-agent, sampling and analysis, laboratory skills, medical, pre-hospital treatment, hospital preparedness, and courses for police first responders. Each year, over 1000 first responders and emergency response experts benefit from over 45 OPCW events conducted in more than 35 partner training centres around the world. In this context, we intend to make full use of the future ChemTech Centre I mentioned before.

Concerns about global terrorism contribute to the increasing interest of States Parties in OPCW's assistance and protection programmes. There is at the same time a crucial set of measures that State Parties need to undertake within their own territories. This pertains to the full enforcement of the Convention. This means criminalising in the national legislation, the development, production, stockpiling and transfer of chemical weapons or the use of toxic chemicals as weapons by all natural or legal persons. The full and effective implementation of the Convention under the domestic laws of our Member States constitutes an effective deterrent against acts of chemical terrorism.

The modern economy benefits of an increasing amount of trade, provision of services, movements of people and knowledge. The quantum and speed of these exchanges globally is difficult to grasp. At the same time, new technologies emerge faster than we can comprehend their implications. Some of these implications give cause for concern.

Political decisions, legal frameworks, multilateral diplomacy, international cooperation, and ethical campaigns represent the first line of defence. Domestically, our Member States need to raise awareness and coordination between a host of governmental organisations on the legal enforcement side. Specifically, these would include the police and judicial authorities, those involved in transfer controls such as customs, ministries of interior, defence and foreign affairs, to name a few. Similarly, Ministries of Education and Information can play an important role in disseminating to educational institutions and scientific communities the ethical norms of the Convention.

The internet, the black market for goods and financial transactions, the relatively easy access to technological know-how are all issues that require a holistic treatment from the point of view of prevention. Under the terms of a Memorandum of Understanding with the World Customs Organisation (WCO), we have the basis for close coordination. The purpose is effective enforcement of the regime for all kind of transfers of scheduled chemicals on a global scale. This partnership is designed to prevent the misuse of toxic chemicals, and strengthen the security of the commercial and industrial global supply chain.

At the international level, we continually seek to foster greater coordination and cooperation between international organisations. The OPCW's Open-ended Working Group on Terrorism regularly reviews the opportunities for enhanced interaction with other international entities. We have a longstanding partnership with the United Nations Counter Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF), now called UN Office for Counter Terrorism.

Each of the programme areas that I have mentioned exists because we, as the international community, have completely rejected chemical weapons. This condemnation must also manifest in a clear, forthright and unequivocal stance against the use of chemical weapons. For instance, in the face of persistent and credible allegations that chlorine had been used in Syria as a chemical weapon, an OPCW Fact-Finding Mission was established in April 2014. Since that time, numerous deployments of OPCW experts to the Syrian Arab Republic have taken place and incidents examined.

In a number of cases, the results have confirmed with a high level of confidence that chemical weapons were used. When such a grave breach of norms occurs, it is important to identify the perpetrators. For this purpose, the UN Security Council set-up in August 2015 an OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism - the JIM. This mechanism established in several instances the responsibility for the use of chemical weapons. State level elements were identified. The JIM also confirmed that the terrorist group that calls itself the Islamic State had used chemical weapons. However, in November 2017 the Security Council did not renew the mandate of the JIM and its activities came to an end.

In June last year, the Conference of the 193 States Parties of the OPCW decided to complement the Secretariat's mission. The Secretariat is now tasked with including in the results of its investigations information that would point to the perpetrators of chemical weapons attacks in Syria. (The decision of the Conference says: "... the Secretariat shall put in place arrangements to identify the perpetrators by identifying the origin of the C.W.") The decision of the Conference of the States Parties also enables the Secretariat to assist, upon request, States Parties investigating use of chemical weapons on their own territory. These developments add to our existing mandated missions and quantum of work.

So far, the OPCW has been exemplary in offering its States Parties high value for money. We have operated on budgets that can be regarded as modest in comparison with other international bodies. With higher expectations, it is natural to underscore the importance of augmenting our resources both human and financial. Complexity in today's world demands specialised services. In the area of chemical threats, the OPCW is the repository of specialised knowledge and skills.

Moreover, as an international organisation, we enjoy the trust and confidence of our Member States. We work worldwide with them day and night. This makes the Organisation ideally suited to play a central role in endeavours designed to deal with all aspects of the chemical threat globally.

As an international institution, our membership is under an obligation to uphold universal values and codified norms. We need to rise above narrow parochial or national interests and serve the larger cause. This means an enduring realisation that security is a shared interest and responsibility and that impunity for the violators will eventually threaten us all.

I am especially pleased to be present here, today. Your deliberations and efforts are indispensable to our collective aspirations. A robust culture of security creates deterrence. It engenders an enabling environment in which the value of the law can be demonstrated. It creates a foundation on which measures for prevention can continue to develop. We need to work together on all these fronts to realise the vision of a better and safer world.

I thank you for your attention.
