



Symposium on Women in Chemistry

Welcome address by the Deputy Director-General of the OPCW, Ms Odette Melono

1 July 2021

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentleman,

It is a pleasure to welcome you to the fifth Symposium on Women in Chemistry.

This is the first time this event has been held online, and we are grateful to be joined by experts from government, academia, and industry from across the globe.

I would like to extend a special thanks to the European Union for providing financial support to the OPCW to continue with this initiative.

Women have contributed to the chemical sciences throughout history, but for centuries they did so largely unseen and unheard.

Women are now, however, heading multinational chemical companies, leading chemical societies, and conducting cutting-edge research.

Last year, for instance, we witnessed for the first time two female scientists, Emmanuelle Charpentier and Jennifer Doudna, share the Nobel Prize in Chemistry.

Despite this progress, we still have a long way to go as women remain under-represented in every aspect of the scientific world.

In higher education, women only make up 35% of students in science, technology, engineering and mathematical fields and even less in doctoral degrees.

In terms of careers in science, globally less than 30% of researchers are female. Chemistry is, of course, no exception to this state of affairs.

In a recent Royal Society of Chemistry study on women in the chemical sciences in the United Kingdom, for example, it was found that only 9% of chemistry professors were female.

To counter the obstacles young women and girls face, we must provide opportunities, role models, and platforms for them to develop their interest in science and create an environment to enable their success.

At the OPCW we have long recognised that to succeed in our mission, we must reflect the diversity of the world we serve. The OPCW is composed of 193 States Parties, which means 98% of the world is under the protection of the Convention. So, diversity for the Organisation means both geographical representation and gender parity.

The OPCW understands that its mission to promote the peaceful uses of chemistry will only be achieved if all women have the chance to excel in the chemical sciences. This was why the Organisation launched the Symposium on Women in Chemistry initiative in 2016.

Today, it is the OPCW's flagship event for exploring the challenges and possibilities for women engaged in the chemical sciences across all relevant sectors.

It seeks to strengthen women's awareness of the peaceful uses of chemistry, as well as to promote the wide range of OPCW capacity building programmes available to them.

Importantly, it supplies an interactive forum to share experiences, build networks, and advance careers.

This year we will also be walking participants through the efforts of the OPCW Secretariat to support gender mainstreaming.

In particular, we will focus on our activities under the International Gender Champions initiative and our internal programmes aimed at gender equality.

Indeed, this is part of the OPCW's drive to become a more inclusive workplace.

We are committed to achieving gender parity at all levels of the professional and higher categories of our staff.

In fact, the Organisation has already attained this goal in the senior management structure. We are aware, though, that more can be done in our recruitment process to ensure the Organisation is as inclusive as possible.

Accordingly, the OPCW has developed a new sourcing strategy to attract candidates from the widest possible pool, especially in technical positions such as inspectors.

We have also recently conducted a Gender and Diversity Audit to explore how to further guarantee equality across the Secretariat.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The peaceful use of chemistry is vital to improving the quality of life of all people and contributing to the safety and security of future generations.

Women must be empowered to participate fully and meaningfully in this global effort.

I am confident that with your active participation, this Symposium will contribute towards advancing women's careers and education in chemistry.

I wish you a productive day and fruitful discussion.
