



United Nations Disarmament Fellowship Programme

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

24 September 2021, OPCW Headquarters

Distinguished Fellows,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to welcome the Fellowship Programme and its participants back to the OPCW.

The past eighteen months have been a challenge for everyone.

Nonetheless, over this difficult period the OPCW has remained resilient and continues to deliver on all its mandates.

Today, you will hear from OPCW staff members who are involved in the wide array of activities in the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

This treaty is unique in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation – it is the first multilateral instrument to verifiably ban and eliminate an entire class of weapons of mass destruction.

And it is within this framework that we will be able to realise our ultimate objective which is a world free of chemical weapons.

Immense strides have been made in this direction and next year we will celebrate an important milestone for the OPCW when we mark the 25th anniversary of the Convention's entry into force.

It will be a key opportunity to re-commit to the goals of the Convention as well as take stock of the significant achievements of the past quarter century.

We have come close to total chemical weapons disarmament during this time.

As at 31 July 2021, 98.75% of declared chemical weapons have been destroyed.

And by 2023, the United States, the last declared chemical weapon possessor state, is expected to complete the destruction of its stockpile of chemical warfare agents.

The strength of the Convention has been built on one of the most extensive verification regimes ever devised for a disarmament treaty.

Even in the middle of the pandemic our inspectors continued to monitor the destruction of chemical weapons stocks with modifications to ensure their health and safety.

We have also made rapid progress towards full universality of the Convention.

Membership now stands at 193 States Parties, with only four countries remaining outside of it.

It is vital that all countries join the Convention and we continue to engage with the States not Party in this respect.

This strong record of achievement was acknowledged by the award in 2013 of the Nobel Peace Prize.

While our efforts to eradicate these weapons have been unprecedented, it is a disturbing reality that the threat of chemical weapons remains with us.

In recent years we have witnessed toxic chemicals used for hostile purposes in the United Kingdom, Malaysia, Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic.

The efforts of the OPCW in the Syrian Arab Republic to address the use of chemical weapons are ongoing.

Our mission in Syria continues through three different teams: the Fact-Finding Mission, the Declaration Assessment Team and the Investigation and Identification Team.

A comprehensive briefing will be provided later today on these ongoing operations and their results to date.

The persistent use of chemical weapons even at a time when we thought they had been consigned to history drives home the point that the OPCW's work is far from over.

We need to remain ever vigilant towards existing and emerging threats, including the threat from non-State actors.

In this respect, it is critical that each State Party adopts the necessary national implementation measures.

Likewise, keeping pace with developments in science and technology will play an important role in preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons.

The OPCW Scientific Advisory Board, which comprises eminent experts from different States Parties, helps us keep abreast of new discoveries in science and technology and their impact on the Convention.

The OPCW's Centre for Chemistry and Technology, or ChemTech Centre, which is currently under construction, will also play an integral role in keeping the Organisation fit for purpose. It will support the implementation of the Convention by enhancing our programmes to help build national capacities in areas such as chemical security and assistance and protection. It will also facilitate scientific research, sharing chemical weapons-related knowledge, and training inspectors and experts from the Member States.

Disarmament Fellows,

I hope that the briefings you hear and the discussions you engage in with members of the Secretariat will help you draw valuable lessons that will contribute to your future endeavours.

As a new generation of disarmament diplomats, you face a challenging and complex international environment and an arms control regime that is under considerable pressure.

The Chemical Weapons Convention is a prime example of the tangible and concrete gains that can be made for peace and security through effective and patient multilateral efforts.

It also demonstrates that to safeguard our accomplishments, we need to guard against complacency, keep focused on new and emerging threats, and work collectively to find common solutions.

I hope you have a fruitful interaction with my colleagues over the course of today and wish you all the best with your career in the field of disarmament.

Thank you.
