



Speech by the Deputy Director-General of the OPCW, Ms Odette Melono, at the Dr José Gustavo Guerrero Diplomatic Institute of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of El Salvador

As delivered on 27 September 2022, San Salvador, El Salvador

Buenos días,
Distinguidos colegas,
Señoras y señores,

It is a privilege to be in the Central American Region and your beautiful country, El Salvador for the first time.

It is also my honour to address you today on the contribution of the Chemical Weapons Convention to peace and security. This is a particularly pertinent topic at the current time when the arms-control, disarmament and non-proliferation architecture is under severe strain.

Over the twenty-five years since its entry into force, the Chemical Weapons Convention has demonstrated that multilateralism can realise tangible and lasting security outcomes. Although the strength of the Convention has been tested many times, it remains resilient.

Today, the Convention stands as a unique treaty, dedicated to the complete, permanent, and verifiable prohibition and destruction of an entire category of weapons of mass destruction. In reflecting on its impact on international peace and security, it may be recalled that the Convention was the outcome of intense and lengthy negotiations in Geneva among diplomats such as yourselves.

Such historic achievements require tireless efforts, unwavering commitment, and the will to find compromise in the interest of the collective good. Representatives from States all over the world must find common ground in their different perspectives and national interests to achieve the singular object and purpose embedded in a treaty.

In the case of the Convention, governments, as well as and civil society, were involved for many years in the preparatory work to achieve this outcome. Safeguarding the Convention and its contribution to international peace and security will, therefore, continue to hinge on our collective commitment and actions.

By working together, much has already been accomplished.

With 193 countries now States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention, its reach is almost universal. More than 98% of the world's population benefits from the Convention's protection. Today, more than 99% of some 72,000 metric tonnes of declared chemical weapons stocks have been destroyed under robust international verification by the OPCW.

We are on track to achieve the destruction of all declared stockpiles in 2023 when the United States, the last chemical weapons possessor State Party, is expected to complete its chemical demilitarisation process.

The Organisation has conducted around 3,400 inspections of chemical weapon destruction facilities to make certain the possessor States Parties have irreversibly destroyed their declared chemical arsenals.

There has also been significant progress in efforts to destroy chemical weapons abandoned by Japan on the territory of China during the Second World War. China and Japan have carried out the excavation, removal, and destruction of around 60,000 out of 90,000 items declared as abandoned chemical weapons. The OPCW has verified the destruction of all those weapons.

Moreover, the Organisation has conducted some 4,000 industry inspections in over 80 States Parties. These inspections verify that the production of toxic chemicals remains solely for purposes not prohibited by the Convention.

The Organisation's accomplishments have not gone unnoticed by the international community. In 2013, the OPCW was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for its "extensive efforts to eliminate" chemical weapons. A year later, the Organisation established the OPCW-The Hague Award, in collaboration with the Municipality of the Hague, to extend the legacy of the Peace Prize.

This Award is part of the Organisation's effort to highlight significant contributions made by individuals and institutions, for achieving a world free of chemical weapons. In 2022, the Award has been revised to include a new young professional's category. This acknowledges the crucial importance of younger diplomats like yourselves for the future implementation of the Convention. It also reminds us that despite our accomplishments, the ever-constant threat of re-emergence of chemical weapons means that the OPCW's mission will remain vital to all generations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have achieved much, but serious challenges remain to safeguarding our world against the horror of the use of chemical weapons. Over the past decade, the world has witnessed repeated violations of the global norm against the use of chemical weapons in Iraq, Malaysia, the Russian Federation, the Syrian Arab Republic, and the United Kingdom.

The most serious violations of the norm have occurred in Syria. This is the ninth year of the OPCW's engagement on the Syrian chemical weapons dossier since Syria's accession to the Convention in 2013 and it is a cause for great concern that this file is still not closed.

The States Parties, through decisions of the policy-making organs of the OPCW, have resolutely demanded that Syria redresses its failure to declare and destroy all its chemical weapons and chemical weapons production facilities. For its part, the OPCW Secretariat continues to implement the mandates it has received through the work of its Declaration Assessment Team, the Fact-Finding Mission and the Identification and Investigation Team.

Other recent incidents, such as the poisoning of two members of the Skripal family in Salisbury and the death of Dawn Sturgess in Amesbury both in the United Kingdom in 2018, as well as the poisoning of Alexei Navalny in the Russian Federation in 2020, are also deeply troubling. On these occasions the OPCW Secretariat provided technical assistance to the United Kingdom and Germany to independently confirm the identity of the chemical warfare agents used.

The OPCW is also gravely concerned about the threat of use of chemical weapons in the current armed conflict in Ukraine and has been closely monitoring the security situation there since the end of February. The Director-General has been in constant contact with both the Russian Federation and Ukraine. We have provided training to first responders and remain ready to provide assistance and protection should we be requested to do so.

Furthermore, the threat posed by non-State actors acquiring and using chemical weapons is no longer a theoretical possibility: as ISIL has demonstrated in Iraq and in the Syrian Arab Republic, it is a dark reality. It is also a stark reminder that we must remain vigilant.

Accordingly, the OPCW has been addressing the use of chemical weapons by non-State actors in a more comprehensive manner, through its Open-Ended Working Group on Terrorism and by implementing the measures set out in the Executive Council's 2017 decision on Non-State Actors. The OPCW cooperates and coordinates with agencies such as the United Nations Office of Counter Terrorism and the UN Security Council Resolution 1540 Committee.

We address the threats posed by States and non-State actors, while also monitoring the risks from the growing chemical industry. All over the world, the chemical industry has been developing in technical sophistication, size and scope. States Parties have declared around 5,000 chemical production facilities relevant to the Convention, which are producing an expanding range of new compounds.

These include so-called dual-use chemicals, like chlorine. These types of chemicals are frequently used as components of products legitimately manufactured by the chemical industry but can also be used as chemical weapons.

Cross-border transfers of chemicals for different purposes such as pharmaceuticals, agrochemicals, and a range of consumer products, are also increasing. The risk of these chemicals being diverted for malicious purposes must be managed. This applies throughout the chemical life cycle, including research, development, production, commercialisation, transportation, storage, and use.

A comprehensive approach to addressing this issue starts at the national level.

The adoption and enforcement of legislation for implementing the Convention is an obligation of all States Parties and fundamental to preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons. This task requires the active involvement and commitment of different national actors and institutions, including parliaments, the judiciary, as well as ministries such as foreign affairs, defence, interior, trade, industry, and science, among others.

As at 1 July 2022, 158 States Parties had reported the adoption of national implementing legislation out of which 118 had reported legislation covering all initial measures. In the Latin America and Caribbean Region, 16 States Parties have adopted legislation covering all the initial measures required by the Convention. Eleven have adopted legislation that covers some of those initial measures, and six are yet to report on the adoption of any implementing legislation at all. I urge all States Parties in the region to place the domestic implementation of the Convention high on the national agenda.

I commend El Salvador's efforts at strengthening its legal framework on the Convention. El Salvador is doing so by developing specialized implementing legislation that addresses the gaps identified in its current regime. I encourage El Salvador to continue to move forward with the adoption of the new draft law. This may also inspire other countries in the region that face similar challenges.

The Secretariat offers a broad range of opportunities to support El Salvador and all States Parties. We assist with developing relevant legislation; we provide training for customs authorities; we build national capacity related to declarations and inspections; we expand emergency and response capacities; and we help you to strengthen chemical safety and security.

I am pleased to note that one such opportunity is underway here in San Salvador as we speak. A regional workshop is being held where States Parties in the region are exchanging experiences and best practices on chemical security legislation and related risk and threat assessment methodologies.

In tandem with the priorities I have outlined, the Organisation must keep pace with the rapid advances in science and technology. The OPCW's new 'Centre for Chemistry and Technology', currently being built on the outskirts of the Hague, will be important in this respect.

The Centre, which is supported by the OPCW Member States, will allow us to better conduct research, analysis, and training, including for non-routine activities. It will further enable us to deliver a broader variety of international cooperation and assistance activities and enhanced capacity-building aimed at strengthening the implementation of the Convention.

The construction of the Centre is expected to be completed by the end of this year and the facility will be inaugurated in the spring of 2023. This Centre will be a testament to the international community's commitment to international peace and security.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The world today is different from what it was in 1997 when the Convention entered into force. The security landscape has shifted considerably since then and the relevance of multilateralism has gained an even greater prominence as we face a broader and more complex array of security threats. The OPCW must adapt and evolve in this new security environment.

The Convention's Review Conference next year will be critical for keeping the Organisation fit for purpose. It will be a moment for States parties to assess the implementation of the Convention over the past five years, and to set the strategic direction for the OPCW for the years to come. I hope many of you will follow this important meeting, and some of you might even participate.

Recent global developments demonstrate that peace is a priceless commodity, the preservation of which requires regular reflection and nurturing. In its absence, many have tragically fallen as victims to warfare, including to the use of chemical weapons.

We owe it to the victims to ensure that chemistry is used only for peaceful purposes for the benefit of humanity. I encourage all of you, whenever and however the opportunity allows, to become active contributors to the implementation of this tool for peace - the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Muchas gracias.
