



14th Session of the Advisory Board on Education and Outreach (ABEO)

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

7 February 2023

Distinguished Members of the Advisory Board and observers,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the Fourteenth Session of the OPCW Advisory Board on Education and Outreach.

At the outset, I would like to express my deep sadness at the passing of Dr Jo Husbands last year.

My sympathies and sincere condolences go to all of you here, as well as to the relatives and friends of Dr Husbands.

She served on the Board since its inception and worked tirelessly to raise awareness in many global forums about the importance of the peaceful uses of chemistry.

Distinguished members of the ABEO,

I wish to thank the outgoing Chairperson, Mr Shahab Ud Din, for his able leadership of the Board in 2022.

I would also like to congratulate Professor Magda Bauta Soles on her election as the new Chairperson.

2023 will be marked by several important milestones for the OPCW.

As you know, the destruction of all declared chemical weapons is set to be completed later this year.

The efforts involved in this task, by the States Parties and the Secretariat, demonstrate that multilateralism can deliver concrete results for peace and security.

At the same time, the realisation of this disarmament goal reminds us that we need to preserve the knowledge related to chemical demilitarisation.

Safeguarding this know-how is not just about leaving a legacy, but will ensure the OPCW's readiness to act if a new possessor State Party joins the Organisation.

The complete elimination of all declared chemical weapons, however, does not entail the completion of the Organisation's mandate.

Our agenda is an open-ended one that exists in an increasingly complex global landscape of multiple security threats.

As such, it is imperative that we continue to deepen our focus on preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons.

To this end, we must persevere in our activities to reinforce the norm against the use of these cruel weapons.

Raising awareness of its importance helps bolster compliance across the board.

This is all the more important given the negative impact of disinformation and misinformation on the work of the OPCW and other organisations.

Accurate and objective information contributes to countering this issue and builds confidence in the non-proliferation and disarmament architecture.

It also helps foster engagement with external audiences, particularly youth, who prefer to obtain information through social media and the internet.

As ABEO members, you have an important role to play in ensuring that audiences worldwide are aware of the work of the OPCW. Such awareness will foster deeper engagement with the application of the Convention and the goal of extending its protection to everyone.

The new Centre for Chemistry and Technology, which I will say more about later, will be a significant tool for sharing information and knowledge and raising awareness of the OPCW and its mandate.

In addition to the end of the destruction phase of the Organisation's work, this year the Fifth Review Conference will be held.

The Conference will be a chance for the States Parties not only to take stock of the accomplishments under the Convention, but also to agree on a common future.

In that common future, education and outreach will continue to have a prominent role through advice on educational projects and building partnerships with academia and other external stakeholders.

As we move forward, the Board should maintain its focus on e-Learning and active learning. The Secretariat for its part is transitioning to a new Learning Management System, thanks to funding from the European Union.

This new system intends to increase the OPCW's e-Learning offers with interactive modules. You will hear more about this during the session.

The Board should also continue to stand ready to assist National Authorities, upon their request.

The provision of the Board's expert advice is welcome, especially regarding educational projects and in forming relationships with diverse audiences such as chemical industry, academia and professional associations.

Distinguished Board members,

2023 will see another major milestone in the life of the Organisation.

In May, a ceremony to inaugurate the Centre for Chemistry and Technology will be held in Pijnacker Nootdorp.

The ChemTech Centre is a landmark investment that ensures the OPCW's capabilities keep pace with scientific and technological developments.

It will be a hub for research, cooperation, and the exchange of best practices, knowledge, and skills, advancing the global effort to prevent the use of chemical weapons in the future.

I encourage the Board to continue its dialogue on ideas for activities and programmes the Secretariat should implement through the ChemTech Centre.

The Centre will be a powerful instrument for working in many areas that require further consideration of the Organisation's future.

Distinguished Board Members,

I would like to conclude my remarks by stating that I am proud of the Secretariat's multicultural composition as well as its commitment to gender equality.

Nevertheless, I believe there is room for improvement on both dimensions. A wider pool of candidates from all regions will enable us to deliver on our mandate more efficiently and effectively, and we count on the Board to help us in this endeavour.

Distinguished Board members, as we move into this critical year for the Organisation, it is vital that we continue our efforts to engage, inspire and motivate all stakeholder communities.

You will have an important task ahead of you.

I wish you a productive meeting and I look forward to reading the report of the Fourteenth Session.

Thank you.
