



Statement by the OPCW to the Fourth Session of the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear-Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction

New York, 13 - 17 November 2023

Mr. President,

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

It is my honour to address you on behalf of the Director General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, H.E. Ambassador Fernando Arias.

Let me also extend congratulations to you, Mr. President, for your election to this post.

The relevance of the Chemical Weapons Convention

Mr. President,

The Chemical Weapons Convention is a crucial element of the international multilateral disarmament and non-proliferation architecture. The Convention bans an entire category of weapons of mass destruction under stringent international verification.

All States Parties to the Convention have committed to never develop, produce, acquire, stockpile, or use chemical weapons, or transfer them to anyone.

They must destroy any chemical weapons that they own or possess, or that they abandoned on the territory of another State Party.

Furthermore, they must destroy or convert for purposes not prohibited facilities that they own or possess that were involved in the production of chemical weapons.

For 26 years, since the entry into force of the Convention, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons has been overseeing its implementation in support of the ultimate objective of completely excluding the possibility of the use of chemical weapons.

In this sense, the Convention remains directly relevant to establishing a WMD-free zone in the Middle East.

Chemical Demilitarisation

Mr. President,

Since the third session of this conference, the OPCW has reached two important milestones.

These have a significant impact on the implementation of the Convention as well as the OPCW's contribution to international peace and security.

The first milestone, the completion of the destruction of all declared chemical weapons stockpiles on 7 July 2023 fulfils one of the core objectives of the Convention.

It is a great success for the Organisation and for multilateral diplomacy.

The numbers speak for themselves. Over 72.000 metric tonnes of declared chemical weapons have been destroyed under verification by the OPCW.

This is, among other things, what makes the Convention and the OPCW one of the most successful disarmament regimes today.

The conclusion of the chemical demilitarisation process, however, does not mark the end of the OPCW's activities.

The Convention's goal is to exclude completely the possibility of the use of chemical weapons. This task is open-ended and it requires us to deepen focus on preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons.

At the same time, the Organisation must retain and preserve demilitarisation expertise to deal with new recoveries of old or abandoned chemical weapons, as well as to be ready for possible accession of new possessor States at any given moment.

Prevention of re-emergence; new and emerging risks and opportunities

Mr President,

On 12 May this year, the OPCW inaugurated the Centre for Chemistry and Technology (ChemTech Centre). This is the second milestone that I would like to highlight.

Built entirely with voluntary contributions by States Parties and external stakeholders, the ChemTech Centre bolsters the OPCW's capability in research, analysis, training and capacity building.

The Centre is an investment in the OPCW's future, significantly improving the Organisation's readiness to deliver on its mandates and to effectively prevent the re-emergence of chemical weapons. The Centre is a force multiplier for the

Organisation, and includes a strong component devoted to expanding and improving international cooperation and assistance and protection programmes in the interest of States Parties.

The ChemTech Centre is enabling the OPCW's adaptation to scientific and technological developments that impact the Convention's implementation. It will support the Secretariat's ability to monitor and respond to emerging risks, and to embrace new opportunities.

Looking into the future, to remain successful and to effectively prevent re-emergence of chemical weapons, the Organisation must maintain confidence in adherence to the Convention.

In this context, the Organisation must continue to address alleged or proven use of chemical weapons in accordance with the Convention and mandates given by its States Parties.

Over the previous ten years, chemical weapons have been used in five States Parties, including two from the Middle East, namely Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic.

At the request of the Iraq the Secretariat deployed in Iraq in 2015 to assist the Iraqi National Authority with its independent investigations into the allegations of use of mustard gas. The Secretariat confirmed the analysis results reached by Iraq. The Iraqi authorities further concluded independently that mustard gas had been used by ISIS.

The work of the OPCW in this context, its Open-Ended Working Group on Terrorism, together with engagement and cooperation with relevant regional and international organisations on the matter are a statement of the OPCW's commitment to participate in tackling the use and threat of use of chemical weapons by non-State actors such as terrorist groups and individuals.

14 October 2023 marked ten years since the Syrian Arab Republic became a State Party to the Chemical Weapons Convention.

During this period the Secretariat has been:

- a) assisting Syria in ensuring that it provides an accurate and complete declaration of all its chemical weapons programme since 2014;
- b) investigating credible allegations of chemical weapons use in the Syrian Arab Republic through the work of the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) since 2014;
- c) And since 2018, identifying the perpetrators of chemical weapons use in instances in which the FFM determines that use or likely use occurred.

All of this work continues in accordance with the mandates entrusted to the Secretariat by the Convention and the policy-making organs of the Organisation. More detailed information is included in the background paper submitted by the Secretariat to this Session of the Conference as well as relevant documents issued by the Organisation.

Another priority is preserving the relevance of the Convention's verification regime. Under Article VI of the Convention, States Parties are obliged to identify and declare industry activities and facilities related to specific toxic chemicals.

To date, the Secretariat has conducted 4,474 industry inspections in more than 80 States Parties since the entry into force of the Convention. Notwithstanding this record, ensuring confidence in compliance will require adaptations to respond to new industrial trends and to recent developments in science and technology. States Parties continue consultations on these issues in The Hague.

Preventing re-emergence of chemical weapons, addressing threats and leveraging opportunities require full implementation of the Convention at the national level. The Secretariat is enhancing international cooperation, assistance and protection programmes to strengthen States Parties efforts in this respect. Indeed, the role of the Secretariat is to support, and enhance opportunities to implement the Convention. The responsibility of the implementation of the Convention remains that of the States Parties.

National implementation of the Convention is the first line of defence for tackling chemical weapons-related challenges. Full and comprehensive implementing legislation is the only way to effectively coordinate activities of all national stakeholders and to prevent and respond to chemical weapons use. Many States Parties from the Middle East region have benefitted from training and support for drafting national implementing legislation.

In addition, the OPCW's capacity-building programmes promote peaceful uses of chemistry by concentrating on chemical safety and security, analytical chemistry, and the exchange of chemical knowledge.

Since 2015, the OPCW has been conducting a capacity-building programme for States Parties in the Middle East. The programme, partially enabled by voluntary contributions, enhances chemical emergency preparedness of States Parties as well as promotes chemical safety and security. The OPCW's focus on building resilience against chemical threats in the region will continue. The Secretariat expresses its deep appreciation to States Parties who have contributed to the implementation of the programme and invites those possessing relevant expertise and means to consider provision of support. This will strengthen the implementation of the Convention in the Middle East by building capacities of those OPCW Member States, which require assistance.

Prevention of re-emergence is a multi-stakeholder effort: the Secretariat reconfirms its readiness to collaborate with all relevant entities in all regions, including the Middle East, within its mandate and towards this shared goal. This commitment and the interest for the region have been re-confirmed during visits of the Director General in the United Arab Emirates and Qatar in September and October this year respectively.

Universality

Mr. President,

As long as even a single country remains outside the Convention the world will continue to live under the threat of chemical weapons use.

Presently, four states – Egypt, Israel, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, and South Sudan – have yet to join the Convention.

The Secretariat maintains contacts with representatives of States not Party to raise awareness and sustain a dialogue on the benefits of the Convention and the OPCW membership.

Most recently, the Director General of the OPCW held constructive engagement with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of South Sudan, resulting in a joint declaration. South Sudan reiterated its commitment to the objective of a world free of chemical weapons and confirmed that accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention remains a priority.

The Secretariat will continue reaching out to the remaining States not Party and actively promote universal adherence to the Convention. At the same time, it is essential that OPCW Member States further intensify their efforts with all States not Party.

Mr. President,

The Chemical Weapons Convention remains a vital element of the international disarmament and non-proliferation architecture, and as such is relevant to the purpose of this conference.

The Secretariat is pleased to participate as an observer. We stand ready to contribute and facilitate your important work within the mandate of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

I thank you Mr. President.
