

## **“Reinforcing the Norm Against Chemical Weapons”**

**Speech at the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, by**

**H.E. Ahmet Üzümcü,  
Director General, OPCW**

**September 3, 2015**

### **Summary**

This is the text of the speech delivered by the Director-General of the OPCW H.E. Mr Ahmet Üzümcü at the Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis, New Delhi on September 3, 2015. He spoke on *Reinforcing Norm Against Chemical Weapons*.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to address such a distinguished audience of policy-makers and military and civilian experts here in New Delhi.

At the outset, I would like to express my appreciation to the National Authority of India and the Ministry of External Affairs for inviting me to your beautiful country. It is a great pleasure for me to be back in New Delhi.

The Government of India has always provided excellent support for the work of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW).

I appreciate the strength of your country's commitment to achieving full and effective implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

India's involvement in chemical disarmament spans the horizon of our work to eradicate these abhorrent weapons, to ensure they are never again made or used.

Whether through tangible actions in chemical disarmament, robust implementation of the Convention's provisions, or leadership in fostering international cooperation, India has been very active in reinforcing the global norm against chemical weapons.

And with India's regional and global influence, coupled with its burgeoning chemical industry and education sectors, my message today is a simple one.

India's ongoing engagement will be vital for achieving our goal of a world permanently free of chemical weapons.

Allow me to further expand on these thoughts.

By now, the economic growth that India - and the greater Asian region - has achieved is well known. By some estimates, India's economy will soon become the world's third largest. Your country's economy is among the primary drivers powering Asia's growth, and will remain so in years to come.

This growth has translated into increased trade and investment, and with it, tighter economic integration between countries in the region, which of course enhances peace and stability. This is very much welcomed by the international community.

Today I will outline how the text of the eighteen year old treaty that underpins the OPCW's work provides a framework for effective collaboration between government, industry and science to enhance our security.

Before doing so, let me point to some highlights of our Organisation's activities and account for some of its accomplishments.

Less than two decades after the OPCW commenced its operations in The Hague, we have notched several important milestones in ridding our planet of chemical weapons.

Since 1997, eight OPCW Member States have declared over 72,000 metric tonnes of chemical weapons. Of these declared stocks, more than 90% have now been destroyed.

All destruction activities and declarations submitted by our Member States are subject to verification and monitoring implemented by the OPCW - and with exceptional rigour.

To ensure that dual-use chemicals are being produced exclusively for peaceful purposes, some 3,000 OPCW inspections of chemical industrial facilities have been carried out in more than 80 States Parties. In addition,

nearly 3,000 inspections have been implemented at facilities relating to the production, storage, and destruction of chemical weapons.

In a demonstration of the truly global reach of our work, 191 states have signed on to the Convention. Last month, India's neighbour Myanmar has become our newest member.

Near universal adherence to the Convention reflects an entrenched global consensus that such weapons are inhumane, and that their use is taboo.

It was Mahatma Gandhi who said, "The greatness of humanity is not in being human, but in being humane." This speaks meaningfully to the ideals of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

For what can be more humane than forever banishing some of the cruelest weapons ever created, and ensuring that future generations never experience the suffering they cause?

Perhaps no chapter in the OPCW's relatively short history embodies the international consensus against chemical weapons more clearly than our recent activities in Syria. Such activities which, despite a multitude of challenges, brought about some remarkable achievements.

In less than one year following the OPCW Executive Council's decision in September 2013 on a destruction programme for Syria's chemical weapons, we were able to remove all declared weapons from Syrian territory and destroy 98 percent of them, including all stocks of category one chemical weapons.

The challenging operation to transport and destroy Syria's chemical weapons - amid a brutal civil conflict - would have been impossible without the extraordinary international effort that supported it.

This effort encompassed technical and financial contributions from more than 30 countries, in addition to vital security and logistical support from the United Nations.

India was among States Parties who generously contributed to the Syria trust fund.

China and the Russian Federation provided vital equipment in this effort, and Denmark and Norway made naval assets available to the mission. The United States provided a platform at sea for destroying sulfur mustard and a precursor chemical for manufacturing the deadly nerve agent sarin. Finland, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States made facilities available for the destruction of toxic chemicals.

At every stage of these operations, OPCW inspectors verified removal and destruction activities.

Executing this complex exercise required not only consensus of commitment, but also consonance of action.

Prior to Syria joining the Convention, OPCW inspectors had played an integral role in the UN investigation of alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria. That investigation confirmed that sarin had been used to horrific effect in the Damascus suburb of Ghouta in August 2013. Our activities in Syria continue to this day, a topic which I will return to shortly.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We expect to achieve complete destruction of all declared chemical weapons by 2023, within the next eight years. When reached, this will mean nothing short of the eradication of an entire category of weapons of mass destruction - a singular success in the history of disarmament.

And we were honoured - and taken by surprise - when our efforts attracted the attention of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, when the OPCW was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2013.

India is a strong partner in these efforts.

As one of the first countries to sign the Chemical Weapons Convention in 1993, India ratified the treaty in 1996, and the Convention entered into force early the following year. Your diplomats and technical experts were actively engaged in the negotiation of the Convention and in early efforts leading to the establishment of the OPCW. India is well represented in the major committees and bodies of the chemical disarmament regime, and its National Authority for the Chemical Weapons Convention has worked to ensure robust domestic implementation. India is also home to two OPCW-designated laboratories, institutions that are linked to a global network of centres of excellence that underpin our verification efforts.

And the OPCW is now benefitting from the broad experience of its newly appointed Deputy Director-General, Ambassador Hamid Ali Rao, one of India's most seasoned diplomats. I also had the distinct pleasure and privilege to work closely with Ambassadors Mukherjee and Prasad during their tenure in the Hague. They have greatly contributed to the work of the OPCW. It is also a pleasure to see some colleagues who have worked earlier within the National Authority of India or at the Secretariat.

India's commitment to the ideals of the chemical weapons regime was perhaps best demonstrated shortly after the Convention entered into force, by its expeditious destruction of its chemical weapons stockpile.

Even with the support of valuable partners such as India, more needs to be done to make our gains in global chemical disarmament permanent.

Let me now briefly address some of the critical issues that are posing challenges in this regard.

First, a small number of countries have yet to join the Convention, some of which are highly relevant to its aims and scope. Despite wide recognition that chemical weapons are totally unacceptable and illegal under international law, five States remain outside this global ban - namely, Angola, Egypt, Israel, North Korea and South Sudan. We have recently seen promising signs that Angola and South Sudan are moving to join the treaty.

Let me be clear: with 191 countries within the Convention, there can be no strategic - or moral - justification for any ambiguity on chemical weapons.

To build a truly universal front against these monstrous weapons, we remain steadfast in our calls to the remaining five States not Party to the Convention to join without delay.

A second, and more sinister challenge has been the ambitions of some non-state actors to acquire - and use - weapons of mass destruction.

Recent reports alleging use of chemical weapons by Da'esh serve as a stark reminder of the threat and consequences of terrorist groups using such weapons.

We at the OPCW have serious concerns about such reports and are in close contact with relevant States Parties on this matter.

Most of the international non-proliferation norms are ill-equipped to address the threat of non-state actors acquiring chemical

weapons and other weapons of mass destruction since they were largely negotiated and concluded with states in mind.

We cannot, however, sit idle as these threats continue to grow.

While we are not a counter-terrorism organization, the OPCW's mandate does not distinguish between state or non-state actors. It is to exclude completely the possibility of the use of chemical weapons.

To this end, we are actively exploring ways of extending our reach, through better coordination with our Member States and international organisations across a range of measures to prevent - and respond to - acts of terrorism.

Returning to Syria, we recently marked two years since the ghastly chemical attack in Ghouta.

Following the removal and destruction of Syria's chemical weapons, we continue to advance efforts to destroy declared chemical weapons production facilities in Syria. We are also working with the Government of Syria on its declaration. The purpose is to make sure that the declaration is complete and accurate.

Further, as allegations of use of such weapons persist, our Fact-Finding Mission continues to investigate them. In September last year, this mission concluded, with a high degree of confidence, that chlorine had been used as a weapon in three villages in northern Syria.

More recently, a new dimension to our activities in Syria has got underway.

Last month, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 2235, which calls on the UN Secretary General, in coordination with the OPCW Director-General, to establish a Joint

Investigative Mechanism to identify the governments, individuals or groups that have carried out, or sponsored, attacks using chlorine or other toxic chemicals.

This development represents a defining moment for the international community's determination to pursue allegations of non-compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention.

I am confident that our staff will make a significant contribution to the work of the Joint Investigative Mechanism.

Though our mission to eliminate Syria's chemical weapons has brought a great deal of attention to the OPCW and its mandate, there are less widely known facets of our work that are equally important - and have particular significance in relation to the expertise that India brings with it.

India's economic development has seen a corresponding expansion of its chemical industry. Your country's chemical industry now accounts for more than two percent of annual GDP, and the country has the second-largest number of declared facilities within the OPCW's inspection regime. This speaks to India's commercial and technical innovation, and represents an important factor in the country's economic growth. Through first-rate research laboratories and expanding industrial capacity, India can usefully extend its chemical safety and security expertise to OPCW Member States through technical cooperation.

This would be especially valuable for our Member States with nascent chemical industrial capacities.

The OPCW, for its part, continues to work with all relevant stakeholders to strengthen the capacity of our Member States to respond promptly and effectively in the

event of accidents or incidents involving toxic substances.

One need only recall the painful legacy of Bhopal, or the recent events in Tianjin, to remind us of the importance of ensuring robust chemical safety and security practices.

Such practices must extend across all relevant sectors, including national authorities, chemical industries, industry associations, regulators, laboratories and academia.

Additionally, the OPCW works to disseminate its institutional experience and knowledge to States Parties to assist them in the development of protective capacity against chemical weapons, in the eventuality that they are confronted with the use of chemical weapons.

Every Member State of the Chemical Weapons Convention has the right to request assistance and protection in this regard under Article X, and for our part, the OPCW is working closely with its members to ensure we have sufficient capacity, expertise and resources in this area. India's expertise can be of great benefit, in no small part thanks to its CBRN defense capabilities.

Another area in which India can lead is through education.

We have long asserted that the lessons underpinning the education of chemistry be imbued with principles of responsible science. For the task of eliminating chemical weapons - and ensuring that they never re-emerge - must begin in the classroom.

I welcome the recent initiative of India's University Grants Commission to encourage the education of the peaceful uses of chemistry in universities across the country.

By fostering a culture of responsible science and raising awareness of chemical disarmament, India is taking an active role to ensure the success of our global mission.

For its part, bodies such as the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses can amplify the yield of these efforts by fostering dialogue at the intersection of policy, science and industry.

For the OPCW, such efforts are part and parcel of the Convention's broader promotion of the peaceful uses of chemistry. Through Article XI of the Convention, the OPCW actively promotes international cooperation in the peaceful uses of chemistry.

In turn, States Parties, in particular those whose economies are developing or in transition, are offered a range of capacity-building and training opportunities designed to transfer knowledge and enhance skills for the use of chemistry for peaceful purposes.

Such activities encompass sponsorship programmes in chemical research, the development of laboratory capacity, and specialised training in the safe management of chemicals.

I would like to offer a final point regarding the dangers posed by some widely traded industrial chemicals.

One need only recall the confirmation by the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission that chlorine had been used as a weapon in Syria is a stark reminder in this regard.

Because of their toxic properties, we often call them dual-use chemicals.

Take chlorine, for example - it serves a vital purpose in purifying municipal water supplies and as a detergent, but it can also be used as a choking agent to injure and kill people.

These chemicals might not be ingredients for manufacturing deadlier warfare agents, such as those on the Chemical Weapons Convention schedules, whose export is subject to reporting obligations. But their accessibility makes them potentially attractive.

We must therefore be vigilant in monitoring the movement of dual-use chemicals, especially in and around conflict zones, and in relation to any suspicious orders elsewhere.

We must work more effectively at the national level with law enforcement authorities, better scrutinise end-user certificates and share export data at the international level to prevent dual-use chemicals from falling into the wrong hands. This can be done without in any way curtailing trade. It is in fact in all of our interests, including commercial interests, for the chemical trade to be at all times secure.

Diversion of legitimate trade in dual-use chemicals from its stated purposes erodes corporate reputations and can only be bad for business all round.

It is my hope that India can continue to play a leading role to seek solutions and assist in the implementation of many of these efforts, and further support the OPCW in strengthening the national implementation of the Convention in our Member States.

The words of C.V. Raman, an Indian physicist who was awarded the Bharat Ratna and the 1930 Nobel Prize for Physics, are highly relevant for the current standing of our regime. I quote, "Success can only come to you by courageous devotion to the task lying in front of you, and there is nothing worth in this world that can come without the sweat of our brow."

Though we are rapidly approaching our goal of global chemical disarmament, we still have much to do to ensure a future free from the threat of chemical warfare. For its part, India's commitment has been demonstrated not by lofty speeches, but through concrete actions.

Soon to become the world's most populous country, India can give even greater voice to our collective efforts to ensure future generations never again bear the horrors of chemical weapons.

It can speak to the power and supremacy of diplomacy over conflict.

It can bolster multilateralism to further disarmament efforts.

And it can harness its immense resources, especially those of its scientists and industry, to ensure chemical weapons remain a scourge of the past.

Thank you.