

Chemical and Biological News

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

Chemical weapons watchdog to hold special session in June

OPCW has recently found its methods under attack from Russia and other supporters of Syria

Patrick Wintour, June 5, 2018

The world's chemical weapons watchdog is to hold a special two-day session in late June in response to Britain's call to hand the body new powers to attribute responsibility for chemical weapons attacks.

The Hague-based watchdog, known as the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, has until recently been seen as a scientific technical backwater, but as the controversy over the use of the weapons has grown, the OPCW has found its methods under attack from Russia and other supporters of the Syrian regime.

British ministers have accused Russia of blocking the UN from blaming the Syrian government for repeated chemical attacks on its citizens.

In a speech at the Chatham House thinktank last month, the OPCW's director general, Ahmet Üzümcü, called for his organisation to be given the ability to identify the individual, group or country behind chemical attacks, saying the international community needed to address the gap.

At a meeting this week, Britain won the support of 64 OPCW member states for the special session, and the OPCW confirmed in a statement on Tuesday that this would now go ahead on 26 and 27 June.

Britain's national security adviser, Mark Sedwill, said: "We recognise that the global norm against chemical weapons use is being threatened."

British support for a strengthened role for the OPCW grew after the UK concluded that a Russian-made military nerve agent was used in Salisbury in March in the poisoning of the former Russian double-agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter.

The Salisbury incident followed an impasse in November last year at the UN security council when Russia blocked the renewal of the mandate for the body, known as the joint investigative mechanism, responsible for attributing chemical weapons attacks to groups or countries. Russia claimed the body's procedures, including the chain of command over samples, was too lax.

Russia has also mounted attacks on the technical methods of the OPCW's investigations into the Salisbury attack.

Speaking at the thinktank, Üzümcü said: "Today there might be good reasons actually to clarify the role of the OPCW itself in terms of attribution once it has the necessary information at its disposal. Wilful defiance of a valued norm should not be allowed to go unchallenged."

He told the Guardian: "I don't think the international community can afford to continue without an attribution mechanism to identify perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons. If accountability is avoided the potential acceptance of the use of chemical weapons as weapons of war and terror will not be deterred."

An OPCW fact-finding team is due to report on whether chemical weapons were used in an attack in rebel-held Douma in Damascus.

The attack led to US, French and British reprisals, including cruise missile strikes on alleged Syrian chemical weapons sites.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jun/05/opcw-chemical-weapons-watchdog-special-session-russia-syria>

US Slams Russian Veto After OPCW Syria Alleged Attack Probe Fails to Find Blame

TIMOTHY A. CLARY, May 18, 2018

WASHINGTON (Sputnik) - The US State Department blamed Russia in a statement on Thursday for using Security Council veto to block the renewal of a United Nations chemical probe in Syria after the investigation failed to determine who was behind an alleged chemical weapons attack in Syria in February.

“The OPCW’s Fact-Finding Mission does not attribute responsibility for an attack. Unfortunately, Russia has vetoed the renewal of Joint Investigative Mechanism, which was the only impartial and independent body with the mandate for attributing responsibility, at the UN Security Council five times,” the statement said.

Previously, several media outlets and Western countries accused Damascus of using chemical weapons in the Syrian town of Douma on April 7. The Syrian government and Russia have refuted the allegations, saying that it was staged by local militants and the White Helmets non-governmental organization. The Syrian government had also invited the experts from OPCW to investigate the reports.

On April 10, the UN Security Council failed to adopt either of the two Russian-drafted resolutions or the one drafted by the United States which were calling

for an investigation into the reported chemical attack — the diplomats from both sides had used their veto power.

Earlier, the Russian Center for Syrian Reconciliation representatives inspected the location of the alleged attack and questioned local doctors, who said that they had not received individuals with symptoms of chemical poisoning.

However, the United States, the UK and France launched missile strikes against Syria as a response to the alleged chemical attack, despite the lack of evidence. The strike was launched on April 14, same day the OPCW mission was set to visit the sites.

<https://sputniknews.com/us/201805181064559477-usa-blames-russia-veto-opcw-syria-chemical-probe/>

Chemical weapons inspectors reach Douma to probe gas attack

A week after arriving in Syria, experts enter town where dozens died and hundreds were injured in April 7 incident.

April 21, 2018

Inspectors from the global chemical weapons watchdog have finally reached a formerly rebel-held town in Syria where a suspected gas attack took place two weeks ago.

Saturday’s visit to Douma came a week after the fact-finding mission of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) first arrived in Syria, and amid growing questions about whether there would still be enough evidence for the investigators to gather.

In a statement, the OPCW said its team had visited one of the sites of the alleged attack to collect samples for analysis.

“The OPCW will evaluate the situation and consider future steps including another possible visit to Douma,” it said.

“Based on the analysis of the sample results as well other information and materials collected by the team, the FFM (fact-finding mission) will compile their report for submission to the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention for their consideration.”

Earlier on Saturday, the foreign ministry of Russia, a major ally of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, had also said that the OPCW inspectors had entered Douma.

The US and France have accused Russia of blocking access to the site, where rescuers and medics say dozens of people were killed on April 7.

The Syrian government and Moscow say the alleged chemical attack, which prompted a series of air strikes by Western allies as an act of retaliation, was staged.

Security fears

The OPCW team arrived in Damascus on Saturday but had not been able to travel to Douma, on the outskirts of the capital, due to security concerns following a reconnaissance mission by a United Nations team at two sites in the town on Tuesday.

The UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) officials had to withdraw from the first location as the presence of large crowd there raised security fears.

At the second site, they came under small arms fire and an explosive device was detonated nearby, the OPCW said in a statement.

There were no injuries and the UN team returned to Damascus, but the watchdog had to postpone its visit.

In a statement on Saturday, Maria Zakharova, spokesperson for the Russian foreign ministry, said the delays to the OPCW team were “unacceptable”.

On Monday, during an emergency meeting at the OPCW’s headquarters in The Hague, Western diplomats accused the Syrian government and Moscow of obstructing the team.

Russia denied the claims, saying parts of Douma still needed to be de-mined and said the watchdog’s inspectors would enter on Wednesday.

Yet, France and the US appeared to question the purpose of such a mission, warning at the time that any incriminating evidence had likely been removed by then.

Earlier this week, Ishak Majali, a former OPCW inspector, said it was unlikely the inspectors would find evidence at the site after such delay.

“It has been a lot of time since the attack took place,” he told Al Jazeera.

“So, if you are in control of a site with chemicals for such a long time, it’s very easy actually to tamper with the place and to change the facts on the ground.

“You can actually do what we call it in the military business as the decontamination process, which is to remove all the evidence on the ground by using other chemicals to neutralise the chemicals on the ground. Also, you can tamper with the munition itself ... to prepare some witnesses or to prepare some medical reports.”

Government raids

The town of Douma was under rebel control and facing a government air and ground assault when the suspected attack took place.

Images that emerged from Douma at the time showed lifeless bodies collapsed in crowded rooms, some with foam around their noses and mouths.

Opposition groups gave up the town in the days after the incident. Thousands of people - rebels and civilians - left on buses to northern Syria, believing they could not reconcile with the government after it took over the town.

The evacuations were the latest in a string of population transfers around the Syrian capital that have displaced more than 60,000 people as the government reconsolidates control after seven years of civil war.

UN officials and human rights groups say the evacuations amount to a forced population displacement that may be a war crime.

Also on Saturday, Syrian government forces continued an offensive against rebel-held parts of the capital's outskirts, in a bid to drive out remaining armed opposition groups, according to state media and war monitors.

Rebel-held pockets near Damascus have been witnessing intense bombardment and shelling from Assad's forces since Thursday.

Some of the areas, including Hajar al-Aswad and Tadamun in the southern district of Damascus, have been under Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as ISIS) group's control since April 2015.

The areas comprise the majority of the Palestinian Yarmouk refugee camp, which lies about 8km from central Damascus.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/04/chemical-weapons-inspectors-reach-douma-probe-gas-attack-180421130414025.html>

France has proof Syrian government conducted chemical weapons attack: Macron

Ludovic Marin | Reuters

France has proof the Syrian government carried out a chemical weapons attack last week and will decide whether to strike back when all the necessary information has been gathered, President Emmanuel Macron said on Thursday.

France is expected to join the United States and Britain in carrying out air strikes or some other form of attack in response to the use of the weapons but it remains unclear when that might happen or even if it definitely will.

"We have proof that last week, now 10 days ago, that chemical weapons were used, at least with chlorine, and that they were used by the regime of (President) Bashar al-Assad," Macron said, without giving details on the evidence or how it was acquired.

The attack on the town of Douma on April 7 killed dozens of people, including children.

"Our teams have been working on this all week and we will need to take decisions in due course, when we judge it most useful and effective," Macron told broadcaster TF1 when asked whether a red line had been crossed.

U.S. President Donald Trump tweeted on Thursday morning: "Never said when an attack on Syria would take place. Could be very soon or not so soon at all!"

Macron said France wanted to remove the Syrian regime's chemical weapons capabilities. When asked whether those would be the targets of strikes he said: "When we decide it, and once we have verified all the information."

The French army is preparing itself for a possible riposte as it waits for the political

green light, military sources told Reuters, with several sources underscoring the difficulty of outlining the objectives of such an operation.

The sources said if France were to attack, the strikes would most likely come from warplanes rather than its naval frigate off the Lebanese coast, and that they would likely to take off from France rather than its Middle East bases.

The subject of chemical weapons' use in Syria has been a thorny issue for Macron. He has warned that he would not accept the use of chemical weapons, which he said was a "red line" that would draw French action, even unilateral.

However, after persistent reports of chlorine attacks over the last year, his foreign minister and aides have been more nuanced saying a response would hinge on French intelligence proving both the use of chemicals and fatalities, and a riposte would most likely be in coordination with the United States.

"France will not allow any escalation that could harm the stability of the region as a whole, but we can't let regimes that think they can do everything they want, including the worst things that violate international law, to act," Macron said.

<https://www.cnn.com/2018/04/12/france-has-proof-syrian-government-conducted-chemical-weapons-attack-macron.html>

Nipah virus has been contained, last persons who tested positive have recovered, says Kerala health minister

June 10, 2018

Kozhikode (Kerala): The deadly Nipah virus that struck Kozhikode last month and

claimed 16 lives in Kerala has been finally contained and the last of the two positive cases have fully recovered, said Kerala Health Minister KK Shailaja on Sunday.

People wear safety masks as a precaution against the Nipah virus in Kozhikode. File image. PTI

The virus struck at Kozhikode which saw 13 people dying, while three deaths were reported from nearby Malappuram district, and more than 2,000 patients with fever were kept under close observation.

After presiding over a review meeting, she told media persons that the virus scare is finally over.

"We visited the two Nipah positive patients who have been completely cured and according to many, this is something rare. The scare of this getting spread is finally over, as no more patients have tested positive, but a caution has to be there who are under observation, as they have to take complete rest," said Shailaja.

The district authorities, following the scare, had asked to wait for schools to reopen in the new academic year and now schools all set to open from Tuesday onwards while the ban of public functions also has been lifted.

The Kozhikode Medical College hospital, where a special Nipah ward was opened, is now seeing patients returning home, said an official.

<https://www.firstpost.com/india/nipah-virus-has-been-contained-last-persons-who-tested-positive-have-recovered-says-kerala-health-minister-4504665.html>

Nipah virus sparks Kuwait quarantine measures amid outbreak fears

KUWAIT has confirmed it is introducing new quarantine procedures to deal with anyone infected with the Nipah virus in the wake of warnings about its potential to spread around the world in a global pandemic.

CIARAN MCGRATH, June 10, 2018

An outbreak of the illness has already claimed the lives of 17 people in the Indian state of Kerala.

Non-profit organisation EcoHealth Alliance yesterday published a contagion map demonstrating how easily the illness could travel to other continents via a network of international flights.

Kuwait is 10th on the list of countries most closely connected with the outbreak's point of origin, while neighbouring Saudi Arabia is 3rd.

The Middle East North Africa Financial Network (MENAFN) website reported: "The Ministry of Health has adopted procedures that will be followed in case anyone is infected with Nipah virus.

"Sources confirmed these procedures are in line with the directive of the World Health Organisation (WHO) to monitor patients in hospitals, control the virus and implement the public health policy.

"Sources disclosed the procedures include isolation of the infected person.

Once the diagnosis is confirmed, patients in stable condition should be transferred to the Infectious Diseases Hospital and there is no need to confine them at the Intensive Care Unit (ICU), sources added.

"Sources said the ministry also stressed the need for coordination between doctors to

report suspected cases, especially those coming from epidemic areas."

GETTY

Nipah, is a zoonotic disease, meaning it is spread from animals to humans.

In this case, it appears to have been transferred from fruit bats to humans, via consumption of date palm sap which has been contaminated with a bat's urine or saliva.

Symptoms can include respiratory difficulties and swelling of the brain, with the virus having a fatality rate of between 40 and 75 percent.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) ranks Nipah as one of its R&D Blueprint priority diseases.

WHO is supporting affected and at risk countries with technical guidance on how to manage outbreaks of Nipah virus

The World Health Organisation

This refers to illnesses for which the WHO feels there is an urgent need for accelerated research and development of treatments and vaccines.

The WHO said: "In the absence of a vaccine, the only way to reduce or prevent infection in people is by raising awareness of the risk factors and educating people about the measures they can take to reduce exposure to the Nipah virus.

"WHO is supporting affected and at risk countries with technical guidance on how to manage outbreaks of Nipah virus and on how to prevent their occurrence."

EcoHealth Alliance Director of Data Science Toph Allen said in relation to its simulation: "In an increasingly connected world, we believe it's imperative we get in front of

outbreaks before they're given a chance to become full-blown pandemics."

<https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/972221/nipah-virus-kuwait-quarantine-measures-possible-outbreak-pandemic>

North Korean defector's blood 'contains signs of anthrax infection' amid concerns over biological weapons

Josh Gabbatiss, December 27, 2017

The blood of a soldier who defected from North Korea this year has been found to contain antibodies suggesting exposure to anthrax (*Getty Images*)

A North Korean soldier who defected to the South earlier this year was reportedly found with antibodies in his bloodstream that suggest past exposure to anthrax.

Signs of the deadly bacterial infection have added to fears in South Korea that the North is developing biological weapons, according to local media.

The soldier was not identified, but South Korea authorities were quoted as saying he had developed immunity to the disease prior to his defection.

"Anthrax antibodies have been found in the North Korean soldier who defected this year," an unnamed South Korean intelligence official told local news network Channel A on Tuesday.

Antibodies are molecules that indicate immunity to a disease, as they are produced in response to an infection and help neutralise potential threats in the body.

Their alleged presence in the soldier suggests he was either exposed to or vaccinated for

anthrax, a dangerous disease with a history as an agent of biological warfare.

North Korea has long been suspected of developing biological weapons.

Testimonies from defectors suggest a North Korean programme to develop biological weaponry has existed since the 1960s.

When the regime publicised the Pyongyang Biological Technology Research Institute in 2015, US analysts suggested the equipment there – allegedly used for pesticide research – could be used to make biological weapons.

"It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the institute is intended to produce military-size batches of anthrax," wrote Melissa Hanham, a North Korea specialist at the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies, in a blog post commenting on the facility.

"Regardless of whether the equipment is being used to produce anthrax today, it could be in the near future."

Anthrax is found naturally in the soil, particularly in agricultural regions in developing countries.

Its appeal as an agent of biological warfare comes from the relative ease with which regimes can acquire the microbes responsible, and subsequently release them without arousing suspicion.

Both South Korea's National Intelligence Service and Defense Ministry told CNN they could not confirm the new report concerning the North Korean defector.

The Defense Ministry noted that none of the four soldiers who defected in 2017 are believed to have worked in North Korea's biochemical warfare unit.

Nevertheless, the report comes at a time of heightened tensions surrounding biological weapons in the region.

The recent US National Security Strategy stated: “North Korea – a country that starves its own people – has spent hundreds of millions of dollars on nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons.”

It went on to say: “North Korea is also pursuing chemical and biological weapons which could also be delivered by missile.”

The North Korean state-run Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) called these claims “groundless”.

KCNA also threatened “revenge” against the US for claiming North Korea is defying the terms of the Biological Weapons Convention, which bans the development, production and stockpiling of biological weapons.

South Korea’s military is working on an anthrax vaccine, but according to Defense Ministry spokeswoman Choi Hyun-soo one will only be developed by the end of 2019.

In the meantime, CNN reported that 1,000 doses of anthrax vaccines were imported to South Korea in November to be given to biochemical counterterrorism agents or civilians in the case of anthrax exposure.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/north-korea-defector-anthrax-infection-blood-signs-biological-weapons-evidence-nuclear-testing-a8130456.html>

North Korea says it ‘will take revenge’ for US saying it is developing biological weapons

Mythili Sampathkumar, December 20, 2017

North Korea said it will “take revenge” on the US for saying Pyongyang is developing biological weapons.

North Korea said via its state media Korean Central News Agency that: “as a state party to the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC), [it] maintains its consistent stand to oppose development, manufacture, stockpiling and possession of biological weapons.”

“The more the US clings to the anti-[North Korea] stifling move...the more hardened the determination of our entire military personnel and people to take revenge will be,” said the KCNA.

KCNA called the US claims “groundless” and said it was just an excuse for harsher sanctions after President Donald Trump labelled North Korea as a state sponsor of terrorism.

The Trump administration made the assertion that the isolated Asian country was developing a missile capable of carrying the biological weapons as well in its National Security Strategy document.

The 55-page document focused on Mr Trump’s “America First” approach to security and stated: “North Korea—a country that starves its own people—has spent hundreds of millions of dollars on nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons that could threaten our homeland.”

The administration also wrote that: “North Korea is also pursuing chemical and biological weapons which could also be delivered by missile.”

According to a 2016 report by the Korea Institute for Defence Analyses, North Korea has 13 types of pathogens that can be weaponised such as anthrax and clostridium botulinum.

The US claims and subsequent North Korean denial come at a time when South Korean officials proposed a delay in military drills with the US in order to ensure a peaceful 2018 Winter Olympics, not ease tensions with North Korea and China.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in is seeking to soothe relations with Pyongyang and with China, the North's lone major ally, before the Olympics begin in South Korea in February.

China, which hosted years of on-again-off-again talks to try to end the North Korea standoff, resumed some blocks on group tours to South Korea and rebuked Seoul for firing warning shots at Chinese fishing boats.

A spokesperson for South Korean President Moon Jae-in said the proposed delay was “confined to our efforts to host a peaceful Olympics. We are only talking about the exercises which are supposed to take place during the Olympics and Paralympics.”

Mr Moon had travelled to China to discuss the proposal last week, after it had been presented to the US.

North Korea sees the regular joint exercises as preparation for war.

China has maintained that the deployment of a US anti-missile system known as the Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (Thaad) near Seoul is a threat to it because South Korea could use the powerful radar to see deep inside China's territory.

The South argues it needs Thaad to guard against the threat posed by North Korea.

China and Russia have proposed a “freeze for freeze” arrangement under which North Korea would stop its nuclear and missile tests in exchange for a halt to the exercises.

However, South Korea has denied that the proposed delay had anything to do with the “freeze” idea

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/north-korea-biological-weapons-us-revenge-trump-kim-jong-un-pyongyang-a8120376.html>

DISARMAMENT

Chemical Weapons Convention Embodies Universal Values, Asserts OPCW Director-General During Visit to Italy

May 29, 2018

Speaking at the Open Day for Master of Science in European Economy and Business Law, the Director-General contended that to be effective, legal instruments – such as the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) – must be underpinned by universal values.

Ambassador Üzümcü stated that it is “the unwavering commitment of States Parties to the letter and the spirit of the Convention” that has enabled the success of global chemical disarmament.

However, the CWC's significance “reaches beyond the field of disarmament” as the treaty “embodies the moral dominion of respect for agreed norms over arbitrary and irresponsible behaviour. It reinforces the sanctity of humanitarian ideals over warfare and the importance of collaborative approaches to achieving peace.”

Tor Vergata's International Master Courses in Protection against Chemical, Biological,

Radiological, Nuclear and Explosive Events won the 2017 The OPCW-The Hague Award.

The courses educate the next generations of first responders and advisors to policymakers, and since 2009 have produced over 170 international experts.

Background

The annual OPCW–The Hague award was established in 2014 by the OPCW to recognise and honour individuals and institutions that have made an outstanding contribution towards the goal of a world permanently free of chemical weapons; such contributions include promoting the peaceful uses of chemistry and preventing its misuse.

The Award is a tribute reflecting the honour bestowed upon the OPCW for winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 2013 and is supported by a generous financial contribution from the City of The Hague.

As the implementing body for the Chemical Weapons Convention, the OPCW oversees the global endeavour to permanently and verifiably eliminate chemical weapons. Since the Convention's entry into force in 1997 – and with its 192 States Parties – it is the most successful disarmament treaty eliminating an entire class of weapons of mass destruction.

Over 96% of all chemical weapon stockpiles declared by possessor States have been destroyed under OPCW verification. For its extensive efforts in eliminating chemical weapons, the OPCW received the 2013 Nobel Peace Prize.

<https://www.opcw.org/news/article/chemical-weapons-convention-embodies-universal-values-asserts-opcw-director-general-during-visit-to-italy/>

OPCW Director-General Congratulates Iraq on Complete Destruction of Chemical Weapons Remnants

March 13, 2018

THE HAGUE, Netherlands — 13 March 2018 — The Director-General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), Ambassador Ahmet Üzümcü, congratulated the Government of Iraq on the completion of the destruction of the country's chemical weapons remnants, during today's visit of the Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research of Iraq, H.E. Dr Abdulrazzaq Al Jaleel Essa.

“I welcome this notable achievement and congratulate the Iraqi Government for their efforts in ensuring the proper destruction of these dangerous chemicals and for fulfilling its obligations deriving from the Chemical Weapons Convention,” stated the Director-General.

Ambassador Üzümcü presented to the Minister a certificate recognising the Iraqi Government's complete destruction of its chemical weapons remnants.

The Director-General further briefed Minister Al Jaleel Essa on the OPCW's latest activities, including progress in the destruction of the declared former chemical weapons production facilities, the threat posed by non-State actors' access to chemical weapons, and peaceful uses of chemistry.

Minister Al Jaleel Essa's delegation included Iraq's Permanent Representative to the OPCW, H.E. Dr Hisham Al-Alawi; the Head of the Al Muthana project, Mr Magid Shannoon Khalaf, Spokesperson to the Minister, Dr Hayder Mohammed Jebur; and Ms Kani Shareef, First Secretary, Permanent Representation of Iraq to the OPCW.

Background

Iraq's initial declaration, submitted in March 2009, referred to remnants of chemical weapons stored in two storage bunkers at the Al Muthana site. Owing to the hazardous conditions within the bunkers, Iraq was not able to conduct a detailed on-site inventory immediately after the initial declaration. Destruction activities started in 2017, once the on-going security situation had been addressed.

In November 2017 and February 2018, OPCW's Technical Secretariat confirmed that the four former chemical weapons production facilities in Iraq were completely destroyed.

One former chemical weapons production facility in Iraq remains subject to inspection until 2028. In 2012, OPCW approved a detailed plan, submitted by Iraq, for this facility's conversion for purposes not prohibited under the Chemical Weapons Convention.

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Over 96 per cent of all chemical weapon stockpiles declared by possessor States have been destroyed under OPCW verification. For its extensive efforts in eliminating chemical weapons, the OPCW received the 2013 Nobel Prize for Peace.

<https://www.opcw.org/news/article/opcw-director-general-congratulates-iraq-on-complete-destruction-of-chemical-weapons-remnants/>

OPCW Director-General Praises Complete Destruction of Libya's Chemical Weapon Stockpile

January 11, 2018

THE HAGUE, Netherlands — 11 January 2018 — The Director-General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), Ambassador Ahmet Üzümcü, applauded the complete elimination of the Category 2 chemical materials removed from Libya and transported to Germany for destruction at ceremony hosted by the Government of Germany and held on 11 January at the chemical weapons destruction facility operated by GEKA mbH in Munster, Germany.

In attendance were high-level Libyan and German officials, including: Minister of Foreign Affairs of Libya, H.E. Mr Mohamed Taha Siala; State Secretary, German Federal Ministry of Defense, Dr Katrin Suder; Deputy Federal Commissioner for Disarmament and Arms Control, German Federal Foreign Office, Ms Susanne Baumann; as well as the Permanent Representatives to the OPCW for Libya, Dr Ali Gebril Werfeli, and for Germany, Ambassador Christine Weil.

The Director General stated in his remarks: "Today's event marks a historic occasion for disarmament and international security. It heralds the end of Libya's chemical demilitarisation process and another step towards fulfilling the core goal of the Chemical Weapons Convention – the complete and permanent eradication of all chemical weapons."

He further expressed that "the removal and destruction of approximately 500 metric tonnes of Libya's Category 2 chemical agents was an extraordinary operation that necessitated agility, creativity, and above all

close international cooperation”. The Libya operation represents “a prime example of the OPCW’s motto – working together for a world free of chemical weapons – in action”.

During the ceremony, the Director-General presented a certificate to the Libyan government in recognition of the complete destruction of all its declared chemical weapon stockpiles.

GEKA’s highly-capable specialised facility in Munster was designated to destroy the chemical weapons stockpile removed from Libyan territory in an international operation coordinated by the OPCW in 2016. The OPCW verified the completed destruction of these materials at GEKA on 23 November 2017.

Background

The Executive Council of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) on 20 July 2016 adopted a decision calling for necessary international assistance in response to the Libyan Government of National Accord’s request for help destroying its remaining Category 2 chemical weapons on an expedited basis outside of Libya.

On 22 July 2016, the United Nations Security Council at UN headquarters in New York endorsed this decision and authorised urgent action.

Both UN Security Council resolution 2298 (2016) and the OPCW Executive Council decision recognised the extraordinary security and environmental challenges associated with these chemicals, which can be used by industry. As pre-cursors for chemical weapons, their removal and verified destruction guarantees they do not fall into the hands of non-State actors.

In August 2016, the OPCW facilitated and coordinated assistance among contributing

countries to support the timely destruction of Libya’s remaining chemical weapons in the safest and most secure manner.

Canada, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Malta, New Zealand, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States contributed personnel, technical expertise, equipment and financial resources. Notably, Denmark provided maritime assets to transport the chemicals to Germany. The chemicals reached the GEKA facility, which had extensive experience in disposing the effluent from Syria’s neutralised chemical agents, at the beginning of September 2016.

The destruction of Libya’s remaining Category 2 chemical weapons in the GEKA facility brought the total amount of the Libyan Category 2 chemical weapons destroyed to 100 per cent. Libya had previously destroyed all of its Category 1 and 3 chemical weapons.

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Over ninety-six per cent of all chemical weapon stockpiles declared by possessor States have been destroyed under OPCW verification. For its extensive efforts in eliminating chemical weapons, the OPCW received the 2013 Nobel Prize for Peace.

<https://www.opcw.org/news/article/opcw-director-general-praises-complete-destruction-of-libyas-chemical-weapon-stockpile/>

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

OPCW Holds 10th Analytical Chemistry Course under Programme to Strengthen Cooperation with Africa

May 22, 2018

THE HAGUE, Netherlands – 22 May 2018 – Chemistry professionals from African Member States enhanced their chemical analysis capabilities during an Analytical Chemistry Course (ACC) jointly organised by the OPCW and Protechnik Laboratories of Armscor (Armaments Corporation of South Africa), held in Pretoria, South Africa from 7 to 18 May.

The participants were welcomed by Assistant Director of the Department of Trade and Industry, National Authority of South Africa to the OPCW, Ms Lebogang Philela; Senior Manager of Protechnik Laboratories, Dr Manilisi Shumane; Executive Manager of R&D Operations at Armscor, Ms Dikeledi Maema; and Ms Halimatussaadiah Mat Som, Programme Officer from OPCW's Technical Secretariat.

The course covered topics including sample preparation, quality control, health and environmental issues related to toxic chemicals, physical chemical properties of chemical warfare agents and an overview of national implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC).

In addition to theoretical knowledge, the course offered intensive hands-on exercises in the handling of different sample matrices for subsequent analysis by gas chromatography (GC) with element-selective detectors and gas chromatography-mass spectrometry (GC-MS). Participants

also gained basic knowledge on the application of GC and GC-MS for the analysis of chemical samples in relation to the CWC.

The course provided a platform for participants to exchange their individual work experiences and challenges in GC and GC-MS techniques, including hardware, instrument testing and optimization, basic instrument maintenance and troubleshooting.

The course - modelled on the Analytical Skills Development Course (ASDC) by the respectable VERIFIN Institute in Finland - has been held annually since 2009 to better support National Authorities in implementing the CWC.

The programme welcomed 20 participants from: Algeria, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mauritius, Morocco, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, Sudan, Tanzania, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Background

The Analytical Chemistry Courses are designed to build and extend the capacity of laboratories in the countries in Africa to analyse chemicals relevant to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC).

The courses are part of a larger OPCW's Africa Programme that strives to strengthen the Organisation's cooperation with its Member States from Africa.

Established in 2007, Africa Programme aims to respond to the particular needs of African countries. The activities include capacity building and raising awareness of the CWC, through cooperation with the African Union and outreach to civil society and academic institutions.

The Components of an Agreed Framework for the Full Implementation of Article XI were established by the decision of the Conference of States Parties in 2011 (C-16/DEC.10 dated 1 December 2011).

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Over 96% of all chemical weapon stockpiles declared by possessor States have been destroyed under OPCW verification. For its extensive efforts in eliminating chemical weapons, the OPCW received the 2013 Nobel Peace Prize.

<https://www.opcw.org/news/article/opcw-holds-10th-analytical-chemistry-course-under-programme-to-strengthen-cooperation-with-africa/>

Experts from Asia Consider New Approaches to Chemical Safety and Security Risk Management

May 15, 2018

THE HAGUE, Netherlands — 15 May 2018 — Chemical safety and security experts from Asia shared expertise and best practises during a seminar run by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), in Siem Reap, Cambodia, from 7 to 9 May 2018.

The seminar - organised in collaboration with the National Authority for Chemical Weapons in Cambodia - brought together 37 participants from 15 OPCW Member States, representing National Authorities, chemical

industry, industry associations, policy makers and academia.

Cambodia's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Defence, H.E. Mr Tea Banch, stated that the seminar would help “create a regional vision to build and strengthen the capacity to respond to incidents [occurring] during chemical transport, storage, [due to] negligence, and/or during natural disasters.”

The Secretary of State of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Cambodia, H. E. Mr Uch Borith, reflected that “The risk of non-State actors' access to sensitive materials remains a major challenge; it is absolutely imperative that such materials should be properly secured.”

OPCW's Senior International Cooperation Officer, Mr Rohan Perera, noted that, “This seminar testifies to the strong cooperation between the OPCW and the Kingdom of Cambodia in promoting the peaceful uses of chemistry and the full implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention”.

The attendees exchanged views on various aspects of chemical safety and security management, including risk management; the role of industry associations in chemical processes and safety management; vulnerability assessments; chemical threat reduction; and, the development of national policy. Furthermore, participants highlighted the pivotal role of the OPCW in coordinating the creation of unified chemical safety and security guidelines for small and medium chemical enterprises.

The participants represented the following OPCW Member States: Australia, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Iraq, Republic of Korea, Myanmar, Nepal, Oman, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Thailand.

Background

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Over ninety-six per cent of all chemical weapon stockpiles declared by possessor States have been destroyed under OPCW verification. For its extensive efforts in eliminating chemical weapons, the OPCW received the 2013 Nobel Prize for Peace.

<https://www.opcw.org/news/article/experts-from-asia-consider-new-approaches-to-chemical-safety-and-security-risk-management/>

First Responders from Latin America and the Caribbean Enhance Chemical Emergency Response Capabilities

May 03, 2018

THE HAGUE, Netherlands — 3 May 2018 — First Responders from Latin America and the Caribbean enhanced their capabilities in emergency response to chemical incidents during a regional basic training course held in Panama City, Panama from 23 to 27 April 2018.

The training was jointly run by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the Panamanian National Authority for the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) with the support of the Panamanian Firefighter Corps and the cooperation of the National Security Council.

Addressing the course participants, Cnl Jaime Villar, General Director of the

Panamanian Firefighter Corps stated: “I hope that this training will contribute to building preparedness in your respective states to respond quickly and effectively to chemical incidents - which is also a component of our common endeavours to enhance regional peace and security”.

The training strengthened the capacity of participant States Parties to respond to incidents involving both chemical warfare agents and toxic industrial chemicals. Furthermore, it provided the participants with knowledge on monitoring, detection, and decontamination operations, as well as first aid in the field.

In addition to theoretical knowledge, the course included a practical session where participants could apply their newly obtained knowledge.

Thirty-three participants represented 17 OPCW Member States: Argentina, Barbados, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Honduras, El Salvador, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, and Uruguay.

These first responders will continue their training at an upcoming advanced course and exercise in Argentina at the end of May.

Background

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<https://www.opcw.org/news/article/first-responders-from-latin-america-and-the-caribbean-enhance-chemical-emergency-response-capabilities/>

Latin America and the Caribbean OPCW Member States Review Initiatives in Green Chemistry

January 18, 2018

THE HAGUE, The Netherlands — 18 January 2018 —The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons' (OPCW) Member States from Latin America and the Caribbean (GRULAC) gathered for a workshop on Chemistry for Safety, Security and Environmental Protection in Buenos Aires, Argentina from 11-12 December 2017.

OPCW's Senior International Cooperation Officer, Mr Sergey Zinoviev, noted that, "Green or sustainable chemistry is a powerful tool in achieving the culture of sustainability, starting right from the design of chemical processes and products; mindful of its prominence, the OPCW strongly supports research and education in green chemistry". Mr Zinoviev further highlighted various capacity-building opportunities offered to scientists by the OPCW and invited the workshop participants to take part.

The Head of the National Authority of Argentina, Mr Mariano Simón Padrós, pointed out in his opening remarks that, "the advances in science and technology, and particularly in the field of chemistry, are key to the development of our countries and this is why Argentina actively promotes them".

During the workshop, scientists and representatives of governmental institutions reported on the latest developments in scientific research, technology, design and implementation of policies in green and sustainable chemistry.

The span of topics was considerable, ranging from advanced biofuels and valorisation of waste biomass, to greener alternative products and risk assessment of chemicals. Policy issues were also tackled, mainly concerning promotion of greener policies in industry to serve development in less advanced countries.

Participants put forward a set of recommendations. One such proposal underscored the need to form scientific bodies that would issue opinions free from political and private sector considerations. Attendees also urged setting up school and university curricula on green and sustainable chemistry.

The workshop gathered 27 participants representing 12 countries: Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, Honduras, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela. Twenty observers from local institutions were also in attendance.

The workshop - held under the auspices of the National Institute of Industrial Technology of Argentina (INTI) - was organised by the OPCW and the International Foundation for Science (IFS). The National Authority of Argentina hosted the event.

Background

The workshop was part of OPCW's Programmes for Support of Research Projects that has been implemented since

1998 to promote the peaceful applications of chemistry under Article XI of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

As a result of the OPCW-IFS cooperation, 434 research projects have received support so far, including 106 from Latin America.

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<https://www.opcw.org/news/article/latin-america-and-the-caribbean-opcw-member-states-review-initiatives-in-green-chemistry/>

UNIVERSALITY

Chemical Weapons Convention Embodies Universal Values, Asserts OPCW Director-General During Visit to Italy

May 29, 2018

THE HAGUE, Netherlands – 29 May 2018 – The Director-General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), Ambassador Ahmet Üzümcü, delivered a keynote speech at the University of Rome Tor Vergata on 28 May .

Speaking at the Open Day for Master of Science in European Economy and Business Law, the Director-General contended that to be effective, legal instruments – such as the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) – must be underpinned by universal values.

Ambassador Üzümcü stated that it is “the unwavering commitment of States Parties to the letter and the spirit of the Convention” that has enabled the success of global chemical disarmament.

However, the CWC's significance “reaches beyond the field of disarmament” as the treaty “embodies the moral dominion of respect for agreed norms over arbitrary and irresponsible behaviour. It reinforces the sanctity of humanitarian ideals over warfare and the importance of collaborative approaches to achieving peace.”

Tor Vergata's International Master Courses in Protection against Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear and Explosive Events won the 2017 The OPCW-The Hague Award.

The courses educate the next generations of first responders and advisors to policymakers, and since 2009 have produced over 170 international experts.

Background

The annual OPCW–The Hague award was established in 2014 by the OPCW to recognise and honour individuals and institutions that have made an outstanding contribution towards the goal of a world permanently free of chemical weapons; such contributions include promoting the peaceful uses of chemistry and preventing its misuse.

The Award is a tribute reflecting the honour bestowed upon the OPCW for winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 2013 and is supported

by a generous financial contribution from the City of The Hague.

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<https://www.opcw.org/news/article/chemical-weapons-convention-embodies-universal-values-asserts-opcw-director-general-during-visit-to-italy/>

State of Palestine Accedes to the Chemical Weapons Convention

May 23, 2018

THE HAGUE, Netherlands — 23 May 2018 — The State of Palestine deposited on 17 May 2018 its instrument of accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention with the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the depositary of the Convention. The Convention will enter into force for the State of Palestine on 16 June 2018.

Background

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<https://www.opcw.org/news/article/state-of-palestine-accedes-to-the-chemical-weapons-convention/>