STATEMENT
BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF THE OPCW
H.E. MR ROGELIO PFRITER

Wednesday, 23 October 2002

Check against delivery
Mr Chairman,
Excellencies
Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me start by thanking you wholeheartedly for this opportunity to address the Committee, a forum so intimately linked to the history and the operation of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

That bond explains why we deem it necessary to come here and exchange with you our impressions on the status of the implementation of the CWC, one of the central tenets of multilateral disarmament, and share some thoughts on the challenges ahead, as far as chemical disarmament is concerned.

My presence here this morning is also a tribute to this body and the United Nations as a whole, where my own personal approach and understanding of the issues pertaining to international security and disarmament were forged in the course of more than twelve years as a delegate for Argentina.

I am very grateful to you, Mr Chairman, for giving me this opportunity during this important “action week” of the First Committee and I would also like to express my thanks through the Chair, to Mr Mohammed Sattar, Secretary of the Committee, who facilitated these arrangements.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the delegations that in the course of the General Debate have expressed their encouragement and support to me. I will make every effort to justify their confidence.

Mr Chairman,

As you know I was designated Director-General of the OPCW by a Special Conference of the States Parties only three months ago. I came to the Organisation determined to adhere to the few simple but very clear principles of sound, prudent administration, transparency and efficient management.

It is no secret that the organisation had been through an extremely delicate period, both from the institutional and the financial point of view, and this inevitably affected its capacity to discharge its mission adequately.
But we can say now that the OPCW has weathered the storm and is back to normal business.

The recently completed Seventh Session of the Conference of the States Parties demonstrated the continued commitment from all Member States, big and small, possessor and non possessor States alike to the objectives of our Convention.

This will come as good news for the international community as a whole and for the United Nations and this Committee in particular, as among the core treaties in the field of disarmament, the Chemical Weapons Convention does have a specific role and a critical place.

It is the single multilateral instrument providing for disarmament, non-proliferation and co-operation and assistance at the same time and on a non-discriminatory basis.

In this, the CWC stands as an example of what can be achieved when the political will exists to tackle questions of global concern through the formidable power of an internationally agreed instrument.

The first challenge in eliminating the scourge of chemical weapons is precisely the elimination of those that already exist.

And we are actively working on the verification of that process.

Possessor States have been making significant efforts to accelerate the destruction of category 1 CW, those weapons developed with a specific military function.

As of 1 October 2002 approximately 7,050 metric tonnes of chemical agents including category 1, category 2 and binary component agents, or more than 10% of the total stockpile declared have already been destroyed under OPCW verification.

The United States and India have met their obligations to destroy twenty percent of their declared chemical stockpiles within five years after the entry into force of the Convention. The Russian Federation is also making significant progress, in particular through the imminent starting of the brand-new destruction facility at the village of Gorny.

At the recent Conference of the States Parties important decisions were taken that will hopefully enable the Russian Federation to meet its
obligations for the destruction of its chemical weapons stockpiles, including key aspects of the destruction programme.

We are also moving forward in the approval of conversion plans in the Russian Federation and finalising facility agreements both with Russia and other Member States in a process that will allow the international community to move towards a more stable and predictable outlook as far as chemical weapons are concerned.

Another State Party is making progress in the destruction of its chemical stockpile.

With regard to Verification in general, it must be pointed out that the coming in line of new destruction facilities expected in the coming years will inevitably and considerably increase the workload of the OPCW. Some estimates indicate that inspection activities might multiply by a factor of five. In any case, it is clear that in the very near future the organisation will be facing a steep rise in verification activity due to a growing number of eligible facilities and installations around the world.

The number of inspections will therefore not only increase but also adapt to the new circumstances five years after entry into force of the CWC.

In this respect we should bear in mind that verification has concentrated so far on monitoring the destruction of existing chemical weapons stockpiles, rather than detecting illegal new production.

More attention and resources will be devoted, in consultation with States Parties, to monitoring the global chemical industry, in line with the Convention.

This is an essential element that underlines the non-proliferation provisions of the Convention, in parallel with those specifically dealing with existing arsenals and their destruction.

The evolution of the verification model is one of the most crucial tasks in our agenda and we have started to take action on it as early as two weeks ago, when the Conference of the States Parties decided to rebalance the number of inspections in 2003 to include more of the relevant installations producing, consuming or processing discrete organic chemicals.
It is encouraging to see that Member States are actively engaged in a dialogue that will enable us to evolve in our verification activities in a manner that is fully consistent with the terms of the Convention and that comes as a logical consequence of the increasing number of the "inspectable" facilities. This fact reveals the dynamic nature of the CWC and it does not represent in any way a change in focus or the philosophy of inspections.

As I said at the beginning, International Co-operation and Assistance (ICA) is an area of indisputable concern for the Organisation as mandated by the Convention.

The Convention encourages international co-operation in the development of chemistry and chemical technology, and aims at fostering trade in chemicals, chemical manufacturing equipment and technology for peaceful purposes.

Recognising the growing importance of these activities, which are of enormous relevance both from the socio-economic and security angles, Member States decided to increase the provision in our budget for International Co-operation and Assistance in excess of its overall growth, in order to ensure that our Member States have immediate access to the benefits spelled out in the Convention in relation to those important areas.

The increase in our budget in the area of ICA will certainly not be easy to finance, but I have given specific instructions in order to seek additional funds through savings in other programmes of the Organisation as we are convinced that all the provisions of the Convention - including those related to international co-operation - merit our full attention. This bold step will allow us to stand even closer to all our Member States, fostering their technical expertise in the peaceful uses of chemistry and ultimately strengthening OPCW's efforts to combat international terrorism through strict adherence to this major international instrument on disarmament.

The use of chemical weapons by terrorist groups is a real and present danger.

The reality is that only a few countries have the means and expertise necessary to protect themselves in cases of attacks with CW. The immense majority of States must rely on foreign assistance to deal effectively with such emergencies.
Membership to the Chemical Weapons Convention provides precisely that kind of assistance.

We are currently improving the Organisations’ level of preparedness to assist Member States in cases of attacks or threats of attacks with chemical weapons.

Just a few weeks ago our first major exercise, ASSISTEX 1 took place in Croatia, involving nearly a thousand participants from several Member States. It is our intention to continue with this kind of exercise, ideally involving other interested international organisations, particularly those already engaged in the area of international counter-terrorism to participate in these efforts, share experiences and look for synergies in this field.

But international co-operation and assistance in the Chemical Weapons Convention goes beyond dealing with emergency scenarios.

It also includes giving adequate support to the National Authorities responsible for the actual implementation of the Convention in each Member State on a range of issues going from basic information about the Convention to guidance in the elaboration and delivery of national declarations or the preparation of national legislation as required by the Treaty.

At the same time, through our Associate Programme, we are training and exposing technical experts from all over the world to sound chemical practices in industry and making them aware of the potential risks of proliferation.

Mr Chairman, distinguished delegates,

Universality is inseparable from the concept of global chemical disarmament.

To achieve it, the OPCW is reaching out to the international community and civil societies everywhere because we are convinced that the Chemical Weapons Convention and the regime it establishes can only be successful if it is adhered to by all States.

At present, 147 States have joined the Convention. Twenty-seven others have signed it, thus indicating their willingness to abide by its aims and objectives.
But a few still remain completely outside the purview of the CWC.

In some cases, like the Middle East, the overall logic of the prevailing political situation influences the decisions of the countries of the region.

In some other areas, like Africa, we are working very actively to promote adherence. The Programme of Action for Africa is an initiative we have recently launched in consultation with the African delegations to the organisation both in The Hague and Brussels.

The recent decision from the African Union on the implementation and universality of the Chemical Weapons Convention presents the OPCW with a challenge we cannot fail.

We are already in consultation with the AU Secretariat to craft a programme that meets the requirements and priorities of the States concerned.

South East Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean still present some gaps and will therefore continue to focus our attention in the near future.

We are beginning to see the results of our efforts, as since June 2001 four more States have joined the OPCW family of nations. Nauru, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa and Uganda have joined the Convention and by doing so they close ranks with the ever increasing number of nations resolutely opposed to chemical weapons.

Another important and immediate issue that I would like to mention today is the upcoming First Review Conference of the CWC to take place in The Hague in April next year.

The Convention in its article VIII states that not later than one year after the expiry of the fifth and the tenth year after entry into force, the Conference of States parties shall convene in special sessions to undertake reviews of the operation of the Convention.

The main areas of review will include aspects related to the evolution and progress in chemical disarmament, the verification regime, national implementation, assistance and protection, international co-operation in the field of chemical activities for purposes not prohibited by the Convention and the impact of scientific and technological developments on the basic provisions of the Convention.
More importantly, the Review Conference will give us a unique opportunity to assess the role of the Chemical Weapons Convention in the current world situation and hopefully result in a strong and unequivocal reaffirmation of the strong commitment of Member States to its implementation.

Mr Chairman

As you and the distinguished delegates can see, only five years after entry into force the Chemical Weapons Convention has already become an undisputed factor in the international security equation.

At a time when the fight against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction reaches a new degree of urgency, the OPCW, as the sole international monitoring organisation on chemical disarmament, deserves all the support from Member States and the international community as a whole.

A fluent, systematic dialogue and interaction with all other disarmament fora, like the First Committee of the General Assembly, is in this context a real necessity.

We are also actively seeking ways to upgrade our co-operation with the United Nations through the Department for Disarmament Affairs. I am encouraged by the full support we are receiving from Under Secretary Dhanapala, which is crucial to multiply areas of convergence and joint action between the UN and the OPCW.

Mr Chairman, we shall be following very closely your deliberations and decisions this year, in particular with regards to items dealing with the CWC and weapons of mass destruction in general.

And it should be like that, as ultimately, no matter the country we speak for or the organisation we represent, we are all united by an absolute commitment to international peace and security through disarmament.

Thank you