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SIXTY-FOURTH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
FIRST COMMITTEE (DISARMAMENT AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY)

STATEMENT BY

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Mr Chairman,

Allow me at the outset to express my congratulations to you on your election to chair the First Committee of the 64th Session of the General Assembly which takes place at a momentous juncture.

It indeed gives me great pleasure to address this august forum especially at a time of renewed hope for creating a more enduring basis for international peace and security through multilateralism, international cooperation and the revival of the stalled disarmament agenda.

The citation by the Nobel Committee in awarding the 2009 Peace Prize to the prime architect of this renewal President Barak Obama of the United States sums up the hopes and aspirations of the international community in terms ofconcerting its efforts through the United Nations and other international institutions in creating global responses to global challenges including in the area of arms control and disarmament.

This encouraging international climate will, I am sure, galvanise the Committee’s deliberations in providing important recommendations to guide the decisions of the United Nations towards productive outcomes.

I also believe that at this defining moment, our experience at the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) as a success story in multilateral disarmament and non-proliferation may offer some useful insights even as we recognise that each specific problem may require modulated solutions.

The manner in which our work has been organised and executed and the sustained culture of constructive engagement and consensus adopted by our States Parties have ensured steady progress towards eliminating chemical weapons and ensuring their non-proliferation.

As a result, we move ever closer to the vision of a world free from an entire category of weapons of mass destruction under conditions of international verification. The contribution this makes to the goals of the United Nations in terms of promotion of international peace and security is both obvious and substantial.

Such progress has been possible on account of several factors. Our membership has grown to 188 States Parties. Since the last session of the First Committee, four new states have become members of the OPCW. With the accession of the Dominican Republic and the Bahamas, the entire region comprising Latin America and the Caribbean is now committed to respect the ban on chemical weapons - a development that is to be warmly welcomed. And of no small significance has been the accession of Iraq and Lebanon - two important countries from the sensitive region of the Middle East where universality of the Convention remains elusive.

Iraqi acceptance of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) has been acknowledged by the government of Iraq itself as a clean break from a tragic legacy of a regime that used chemical weapons even against its own people. Iraq’s accession, therefore, holds much symbolic and political significance.

There is no parallel in any legal instrument dealing with weapons of mass destruction to attract such wide adherence in a relatively short period of just over a decade.

In terms of its disarmament goals, just this week I reported to our Executive Council that an important milestone was recently achieved with the destruction of more than 50 percent of the declared stockpile of chemical weapons.

Since I last reported to the First Committee, another possessor State, India fulfilled its obligations under the Convention to completely destroy its declared stockpile of chemical weapons. I have warmly congratulated India over this achievement and for the unwavering commitment it has shown in reaching this important goal.

Three possessor states having completed the destruction of their chemical weapons proves decisively that chemical disarmament under the terms of CWC is indeed an attainable goal even as there remains the challenge of completing this task within the stipulated deadline in April 2012.

Here I am referring to the onerous responsibilities of the two major possessors, the United States and the Russian Federation.
The Russian Federation which is required to complete the destruction of 45% of its declared stockpile by 31 December 2009 has destroyed 16,024 metric tonnes of its Category I chemical weapons, or 40.1% of the declared aggregate amount. Currently, chemical weapons destruction is ongoing at three facilities located at Maradykovskiy, Leonidovka, and Shchuchye.

The Russian Federation has also reinforced its efforts towards the construction and commencement of chemical weapons destruction operations at new units in already operational chemical weapons destruction facilities (CWDFs).

The United States of America continues to move closer towards the goal of complete destruction of its declared stockpile and the current figure reflecting its progress is 18,200 metric tonnes, or 65.54%, of its chemical weapons already eliminated. Four destruction facilities—Tooele, Pine Bluff, Umatilla and Anniston are currently operating. Additionally, in a recent announcement, the United States declared that it had reached the milestone of 2,000,000 chemical agent-filled munitions destroyed in compliance with the Convention.

It is difficult to fully grasp the magnitude of the undertaking of these two countries given the large quantities of chemical weapons that they still need to eliminate. Considerations of safety in handling the most dangerous chemicals known to humankind while also protecting the environment through containment of toxicity means that inordinate large sums must be expended to construct and operate some of the most sophisticated facilities for the destruction of chemical weapons.

By hosting visits of Members of the Executive Council to some of their destruction facilities, both the Russian Federation and the United States have shown transparency and openness and earned appreciation for the sincerity of their purpose. These visits have also promoted awareness and appreciation amongst States Parties of the enormity of the challenge that they face.

While I have continued to call on both the Russian Federation and the United States to do everything in their power to complete their obligations within the Convention’s deadline, the short time available and the significant quantities of chemical weapons still to be destroyed, make it necessary for the policy making organs of the OCW to ensure that this core issue is appropriately addressed.

Coincidentally, the OPCW Executive Council is considering at this very moment a proposal that requires the Chairman of the Council to "engage in informal consultations with all interested delegations on how, and when, to initiate formal deliberations of the Council about the feasibility of the revised deadlines of 2012 being met by possessor states, and to report to the Council at its next session."

The constructive spirit of cooperation and accommodation that has distinguished the multilateral experience at the OPCW has guaranteed the Convention’s effectiveness and success. And I remain confident that our States Parties will once again find an adequate answer that will both preserve the integrity of the Convention and recognise the genuine constraints that the two countries face. The sincere commitment of the two possessor states will no doubt be a factor in making prudent and constructive judgements.

On my part, I reiterate my deep appreciation to both these possessor States for this firm commitment to uphold and fulfil their obligations under the CWC.

The Libyan Arab Jamahiriya has submitted a new request for extension of the deadline for the destruction of its Category I chemical weapons stockpile. In this request, Libya has outlined the obstacles it encountered in the context of preparations for the destruction of its chemical weapons, the steps and actions undertaken to deal with the situation, and the ensuing tangible positive results. The matter is currently before the Executive Council which is expected to provide this State Party with the opportunity to meet its legal obligations and complete the destruction of its stockpile within the time frame established under the Convention. While recognising the commitment of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya to the goals of the Convention and to meeting its obligations, I would also like to underscore the importance of taking prompt action towards ensuring the complete destruction of the chemical weapons that it has declared.
Iraq’s accession to the CWC has been hailed as a significant milestone in that country’s contribution to international peace and security. In accordance with the strict legal provisions of the Convention that require declaration of any chemical weapons present on the territory of a State Party as well as any relevant facilities, Iraq declared to the OPCW the presence of chemical weapons that had been rendered unusable under the activities authorised by the Security Council. Similarly, Iraq has also declared former chemical weapons production facilities. Given the condition of those weapons, their destruction under the terms of the Convention in a safe and secure manner poses a unique challenge.

The Secretariat has processed and analysed Iraq’s declarations and continues its work with Iraqi representatives with a view to due implementation of the Convention. In preparation for the destruction plan and the initial inspection required under the CWC, a technical-assistance visit to Iraq is slated to take place upon receipt of the necessary security clearances and finalisation of arrangements with the government of Iraq.

I commend the forthcoming and cooperative attitude of the Iraqi authorities and wish to reiterate the full readiness of the Secretariat to provide all possible assistance to Iraq as it undertakes the important task of fulfilling its obligations under the Convention.

On the subject of chemical weapons abandoned by Japan on the territory of China, the Secretariat continues to work with both Japan and China on a trilateral basis. While no chemical weapons have been destroyed to date, work on the draft detailed plan for verification and the facility arrangements for the mobile destruction facilities is progressing. I would like to thank both China and Japan for their pragmatic approach. It is our hope that with the completion of necessary preparations towards the end of the year, the anticipated beginning of destruction operations scheduled for the first half of 2010 will commence.

Mr Chairman,

I have outlined both our achievements as well as the remaining tasks in the context of chemical disarmament. Any comprehensive prohibition against any class of weapons presupposes an effective non-proliferation regime as a necessary complement to disarmament as well as a safeguard against reversion. In the context of the CWC, it is the existence of a well-honed and efficient industry inspection regime that is fundamental to the non-proliferation objectives of the Convention. Such a regime is also critical to promote confidence among States Parties that chemical industry engages only in legitimate and peaceful activities thus advancing the security goals of the Convention.

Since the Convention came into force in April 1997, the OPCW has conducted 3,812 inspections on the territory of 81 States Parties, including 2,142 inspections of chemical weapon-related sites and 1670 inspections of industrial sites. Inspections at commercial enterprises are unique to the CWC and a credit to the global chemical industry that has remained a strong and invaluable partner since the time of the negotiations in Geneva. This support represents an unprecedented example in a disarmament treaty context of collaboration between the public sector and private enterprise in the promotion of security while not prejudicing legitimate business interests.

At the same time we are also cognisant of the fact that a declared total of 5,576 chemical facilities are liable to be inspected.

Based on an objective assessment of the adequacy of the inspection effort, I have consistently maintained that the number of inspections should be increased, especially as the disarmament task progressively winds down.

Reinforcing the industry verification regime is also necessary for maintaining the confidence in the non-proliferation provisions of the Convention. Continued refinement and higher intensity of our industry verification efforts with a focus on facilities most relevant to the object and purpose of the Convention is an indispensable undertaking.

Another dynamic that requires us to remain focussed on industry verification is the rapid evolution in the global chemical industry. While new products and processes and greater efficiencies promise more prosperity, these also give rise to the potential for great harm if not properly supervised. Developments that need to be carefully
followed are increasing overlaps between chemical and biological sciences, the integration of chemical engineering into the life sciences, and the fusion between these and information technology.

New technologies, such as nanotechnology or the creation of new chemical manufacturing methodologies will need to be kept under study and review for therein also lies the potential of abuse.

Industry verification is, however, not the only means of promoting non-proliferation. Deterrence against the possible acquisition, development and misuse of toxic chemicals and their precursors needs to be firmly and efficiently established within the domestic jurisdiction of our Member States. States Parties have to ensure that the prohibitions under the Convention are translated into domestic rules applicable to any individual or other entities operating within their jurisdiction or control.

A year before the Security Council adopted its landmark resolution 1540 requiring UN Member States to adopt all necessary measures to prevent non-state actors from acquiring weapons of mass destruction, the First Review Conference of the Chemical Weapons Convention held in 2003, adopted an Action Plan to boost effective national implementation of the Convention globally. Since then there has been a steady increase in the number of States Parties that introduced the appropriate legislation, including penal legislation. 97% of our States Parties have established or designated a National Authority as required by the Convention. The number of States Parties that have enacted comprehensive legislation has reached a figure of 46%. Another 42 States Parties have laws in place that cover various key aspects of the Convention.

The role of the European Union in supporting through its various Joint Actions, programmes designed to improve the implementation of the Convention worldwide, has been crucial in this endeavour.

We still have to consider ground before reaching a stage where all our States Parties will have in place the necessary tools for the effective domestic implementation of the Convention's prohibitions and provisions. What is noteworthy, however, is the fact that the institutional support provided by the OPCW to its States Parties through a variety of support programmes makes the national implementation of the CWC substantially better than the implementation of other non-proliferation obligations such as those included in UNSCR 1540.

It is for this reason that we take great satisfaction in being able to share our experiences with the United Nations through the programmes that it organises in various regions of the world to promote the implementation of resolution 1540.

Our core message in these outreach and capacity building activities is simple. Full and effective domestic implementation of the Convention enables States to also fulfil their obligations under resolution 1540 thereby contributing significantly towards efforts to prevent terrorism.

In the same spirit, we have worked with and provided cooperation to other relevant UN bodies including the Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC) and the Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate (CTED).

In extending our cooperation, the OPCW is responding to the call both by the UN Security Council and the General Assembly to play its due part in addressing the threat of terrorism and the challenge it poses for international peace and security.

At the recent comprehensive review of the implementation of resolution 1540 held here in New York, the OPCW delegation presented inputs covering not only the cooperation that it offers to the UNODA and the 1540 Committee but also the various activities it organises on its own as well as jointly with States Parties in the context of anti-terrorism programmes.

Mr Chairman,

Besides being a treaty that comprehensively outlaws chemical weapons and their use, the CWC has two other important pillars. Article X and Article XI of the Convention cover international cooperation and assistance. For understandable reasons these are areas of special importance to our many Member States whose economies are developing or in transition.
A major focus of our programmes relates to building capacities in our Member States to promote the peaceful application of chemistry and the pursuit of legitimate industry-related activities.

These include courses to develop analytical skills, support for research projects and placement of interns at various institutions around the world.

One most well known training programme, namely, the Associate Programme attracts talented chemists and chemical engineers and is designed to enhance their skills through both academic exposure as well as placements with chemical industry.

Under Article X of the CWC, States Parties are entitled to receive assistance and protection against the use or threat of use of chemical weapons. Delivery of a quick response necessitates adequate preparations by the OPCW to coordinate actions with those States Parties that have pledged assistance as well as the relevant international organisations. Compiling a database containing offers of assistance as well as holding field exercises are some of the measures that allow an adequate level of preparedness for possible contingencies.

Assistance and protection is an area of growing interest, especially, as perceptions shift from the receding threat of use of chemical weapons in an intra-state conflict to the possibility of terrorism involving classical or improvised chemical weapons. Here too, the OPCW offers capacity building and training opportunities to States Parties for their relevant authorities such as civil defence organisations and first responders.

Mr Chairman,

I now wish to address an issue that is vital issue for the ultimate success of the CWC. With 188 States Parties, the Convention has come close to but not yet attained full universality.

The shared goal of a world free from the scourge of chemical weapons has motivated almost every nation to accept the obligations enshrined in the CWC. Whether it is states possessing chemical weapons or those with nothing to declare, all have had to expend their energies and precious resources to demonstrate their commitment to this vision.

It is naturally disconcerting for them to know that there remain those few who chose not to participate in this project of great significance both from the point of view of security as well as the noble humanitarian impulse that it is designed to serve.

It therefore seems natural for concerns to be raised regarding the possible continued existence of chemical weapons in certain parts of the world once the declared possessors have completely destroyed the known stockpiles.

I once again appeal to States that have not yet joined the Convention, to do so without further delay.

In the region of the Middle East, Israel which is a signatory state, has been forthcoming in maintaining a constructive dialogue. I am grateful to the government of Israel which accepted my offer to receive a goodwill technical mission which visited Israel in June this year. I also appreciate the positive attitude of Egypt whose representatives I have had the pleasure of meeting on a number of occasions and which has also accepted, in principle, my suggestion for a goodwill mission at a time to be confirmed by the country. It remains my hope that these two countries will eventually find it in their interest as well as in the interest of their delicate region to join the Convention.

We will also continue our efforts with other remaining non-members such as Angola, Somalia, Syria and Myanmar. Myanmar has been a fairly regular participant in programmes organised by the OPCW which are open to participation by States not Parties. As an original signatory, I believe Myanmar should not delay any further the long overdue next logical step of ratifying the Convention.
The DPRK remains the only country which has completely shunned all our approaches even for a first dialogue. I hope the issue of chemical weapons will also receive due attention as the international community seeks to resolve the vex problem of denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula and implementation of relevant resolutions of the Security Council.

Mr Chairman,

In conclusion I wish to recall the recent historic resolution (UNSCR 1887) adopted by the United Nations Security Council on 24 September 2009, when the Council met at the level of Heads of State and Government. While primarily focussing on nuclear issues, the resolution acknowledges that progress in disarmament and non-proliferation is an essential element of international security.

The progress being made by the OPCW in fulfilling its mandate is a living example of the success of disarmament and non-proliferation when we work together on the basis of clear goals, constructive dialogue, goodwill and a spirit of consensus. The ban on chemical weapons took a century in its making. It is now a reality. There is no reason to doubt that similar attainments in other areas are beyond our grasp.

This is a particularly propitious moment for the First Committee to reclaim its key role in guiding the international security agenda. I wish you, Mr Chairman and this Committee every success.

I thank you for your attention.