



**ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION
OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS**

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Fifty-Eighth Session of the General Assembly

Disarmament and International Security Committee (First Committee)

General Debate

Statement by

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Mr Chairman,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to start by extending my heartfelt congratulations to you on your assumption of the chairmanship of this important committee of the General Assembly and the one that, historically, has been most intimately linked with the Chemical Weapons Convention and the OPCW.

We have come here today, as we do every year, to report on the most relevant developments on the chemical disarmament front. At the same time we are here to listen to what the voices of the international community gathered in the First Committee have to say about the many issues on the international-security agenda today.

Last year my message was one of hope—but it was tinged, too, with a certain anticipation.

I voiced hope because, after a critical time, the OPCW was just returning to normal business; but there was anticipation, too, because we were facing important challenges to the delivery of our core mission, and because an important event in the life of our young Organisation—the First Review Conference on the Chemical Weapons Convention—was about to take place in The Hague.

I can tell you today that our expectations were satisfied and that the international community has something to be proud of on the chemical disarmament front, in spite of the many challenges still lying ahead.

The First Review Conference took place from 29 April to 9 May. Delegations met during a period that you will no doubt recall was marked by an ongoing conflict and by a lively debate on the crucial issue of multilateralism and its place in the protection and preservation of peace and security through disarmament.

In that context, we must celebrate the unqualified consensus that crowned the meeting, for there emerged from it a resounding reaffirmation by States Parties to the Convention of their unflagging commitment to achieve its object and purpose.

A political declaration, agreed by consensus, outlined the basic findings of the participating States Parties, including their recognition of the ways in which the Convention enhances international peace and security. At the same time, the declaration confirmed the basic foundations of the chemical weapons ban, embodied in its provisions on real and non-discriminatory disarmament, non-proliferation, and international cooperation and assistance.

Together with the political declaration, the First Review Conference also produced a second and more detailed document that set out 134 paragraphs of outcomes and objectives, including the decision of Member States to prepare two separate Plans of Action—one on universality, the other on national implementation of the Convention.

I think, distinguished delegates, that we must recognise this achievement as the significant result of a multilateral effort, at a time when other areas of multilateral disarmament, especially as regards weapons of mass destruction, are confronted with serious challenges and are at times marked by open disagreements.

By contrast, on the chemical disarmament front, we seem to have found common ground—a firm consensus that we have won by working hard to reconcile divergent views, and that we should cherish and promote.

Of course no one would say that we have accomplished our mission, but we have to admit that such widespread support is indeed vital, giving us as it does the strength and the impetus to accomplish the demanding tasks the Convention sets for Member States and the Technical Secretariat alike.

Let me give you a brief overview of these tasks.

Possessor States, of which there are now five, including Albania, have continued destroying their chemical weapons stocks.

As at 1 September 2003, almost 8,000 metric tonnes of chemical agents, including Category 1, Category 2, and binary-component agents, or about 11.2 % of the total stockpile declared, as well as nearly 2 million munitions—nearly 25% of declared stockpiles—have been confirmed destroyed under the OPCW verification regime.

India, the United States of America, and another State Party have met their obligations to destroy 20% of their declared chemical weapons stockpiles to date. The destruction programme in the Russian Federation, after initial delays, is proceeding in accordance with extensions of the deadlines established by the Convention, as agreed by States Parties. Last October the situation was unclear—but in April this year Russia reached an important milestone by completing the destruction of 1% of its stockpiles, and its campaign continues.

Destroying chemical weapons is an extremely complex and costly operation. Billions of dollars are spent on this obscure but necessary task by possessor States Parties, and by non-possessor States Parties that lend their support to destruction efforts. In spite of the delays and difficulties, possessor States are firmly committed to destroying their stockpiles within the timeframes established by the Convention. In the United States, some delays are to be expected, but it has demonstrated enormous determination to get the job done through the allocation of financial and technical resources, and we are confident that it will meet the deadlines stipulated in the Convention.

Disarmament is of the essence, and it makes all the difference when it comes to the Convention. But it is only one of the faces of the Convention.

All States Parties to the Convention have affirmed the importance of a credible verification regime for the chemical industry. It would make little sense to destroy existing chemical weapons without an efficient scheme to prevent would-be proliferators from circumventing the will of the international community by developing new weapons. To date, nearly 1,600 inspections have been carried out by

OPCW inspection teams—nearly two-thirds of these at chemical weapons-related facilities and one-third at about 500 industrial plants producing, processing, or consuming various chemicals that are included in the Convention's schedules of chemicals. We continue to work hand in hand with the National Authorities and with industrial associations around the world to ensure that the verification regime is applied in an equitable fashion and that it does not hamper the economic and technological development of States Parties.

But we have to do more in this area if our verification regime is to remain a credible deterrent.

The chemical industry is an important link in the chain of chemical disarmament, and it cannot be overlooked.

International cooperation and assistance programmes continue to be put at the disposal of Member States, and with increasing success. Through them, the Convention provides added value to the commitment entered into by States Parties. We collaborate with developing countries in their capacity-building to protect themselves against chemical weapons; through the Associate Programme, we train chemical engineers and experts, exposing them as we do so to state-of-the-art technologies and processes; and we facilitate the exchange of information, chemicals, and equipment for the production, processing or use of chemicals for purposes not prohibited by the Convention.

To be truly successful, the Convention must strive for universality.

We are growing.

Last year, I reminded you that 147 States had joined the Convention. Today, there are 156 States Parties, and we are expecting more accessions in the near future. Our efforts have multiplied, particularly in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Taking once more my statement of last year as a benchmark, you will notice that twelve months ago we announced a programme of action for Africa. Since then, we have strengthened our links with the African Union in pursuance of the decision of the AU to work towards the implementation of the Convention on that Continent. We brought our message to the African Summit in Maputo, Mozambique, earlier this year, and the results are encouraging, as we see new African States joining the Convention and starting to benefit from the cooperation programmes and the increased security deriving from their membership in a major disarmament convention.

Concerted efforts are needed to encourage the remaining States not Party to join.

In some cases, our contacts are promising and we are ready to give interested States all the support and guidance they might require to sign the Convention.

In some others, we are fully aware that wider security considerations might be the reason behind the present reluctance of some States not Party to join the Convention. However, we will not give up: We are convinced that, even in areas of tension, States not Party will realise that the chemical weapons option is out of the question and will never be legitimised by the international community, even in the exercise of the right

of self-defence. No one can expect a sympathetic understanding of an ambivalent attitude towards chemical weapons, which have been stigmatised by the international community.

Distinguished delegates,

The risk that terrorists will gain access to weapons of mass destruction requires concrete actions by States and international organisations.

We are playing our role, in line with United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1368 and 1373. Cognisant of the fact that we are not an anti-terrorist agency, we nevertheless want to register our contribution to the international fight against this new menace. Implementation of the Convention is, to be sure, one effective measure against it. In addition, the OPCW has participated and will continue to be an active partner in the consultations carried out under the aegis of the UNSC Counter-Terrorism Committee.

In the same spirit we want to increase and enhance cooperation between the OPCW and the Department for Disarmament Affairs, under the new leadership of Ambassador Nobuyasu ABE, whom I wish to congratulate most warmly on his recent appointment. We attach the greatest importance to cooperation with the United Nations. This is logical and cost-effective, as we are different sides of the same international community of nations united behind the concept and principle of disarmament. Through joint meetings, by exploring the possibilities for the exchange of experts, and by collaborating with UN regional centres, we will offer a number of opportunities for this relationship to grow.

Mr Chairman,

The OPCW is moving ahead with its programmes. Our verification activities continue at a brisk pace, and we continue to multiply initiatives and actions in the field of international cooperation and assistance.

The Chemical Weapons Convention, and the Technical Secretariat established to uphold it and make it operational, are a vibrant reality that we must support.

Before closing, I would like to repeat something I said a couple of weeks ago to our Executive Council gathered in The Hague.

A few weeks ago, a barbaric and cowardly attack on the Headquarters of the UN in Baghdad took the lives of many, including that of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, the distinguished Brazilian Sergio Vieira de Mello. We in the OPCW associate ourselves with our UN counterparts, with whom we are working closely on matters of common interest. Let the memory of those who perished for peace, under the sky-blue flag of the United Nations, inspire our deliberations and guide our actions.

Thank you.