ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

First Committee

STATEMENT
BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF THE TECHNICAL SECRETARIAT OF THE OPCW
H.E. MR ROGELIO PFIRTER

Thursday, 7 October 2004

Check against delivery
Mr Chairman,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,  

Allow me to start by extending my warm congratulations to you on your assumption of the chairmanship of the First Committee, the organ that has historically been linked with the Chemical Weapons Convention and with the OPCW since its inception.

The First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly is a reliable barometer both of the current state of play and of emerging trends in multilateral disarmament, and in that sense your deliberations are of paramount importance.

At the same time, I wish to express my personal satisfaction at seeing you, a good friend and a representative of Mexico, at the helm. We do not forget the distinguished services your nation has offered in the cause of disarmament. From the nuclear test ban to our own field of chemical weapons, Mexican inspiration, ideas, and tenacity have always been present.

Mr Chairman, colleagues,  

Two years have passed since I came here for the first time as the new Director-General of an organisation that, in spite of its youth, had had to face significant challenges.

Today, I can report that the OPCW is moving decisively from being a new organisation still in the early stages of fulfilling its mandate, to being a mature one with a solid and widely recognised record of achievement and the increasing support of the international community. Indeed, Mr Chairman, the OPCW has just completed 100,000
inspector days, having inspected more than 750 facilities of various types in 65 States Parties. We are also close to conducting our 2,000\textsuperscript{th} inspection.

The verification regime set out in the Convention is said to be the most complex and ambitious in the history of multilateral disarmament. We inspect former chemical weapons production facilities as well as destruction and storage facilities; but we also monitor the chemical industry, in a gigantic effort that demands a skilled and well-trained inspection force, and of course the close and active collaboration of the chemical industry around the globe. All these factors converge in the successful delivery of our unique programme of disarmament, non-proliferation, and international cooperation.

Distinguished colleagues,

I indicated last year that, as a result of the First Special Session of the Conference of our States Parties to review the operation of the Convention, two action plans had been adopted—one on national implementation of the Convention, the other on its universality.

Significant progress has been made on both fronts. With regard to national implementation, our States Parties decided to set themselves a deadline of November 2005 for taking stock of how much progress they have made in developing and enacting the national legislation mandated by the Convention and in establishing the required internal mechanisms. As you know, the Convention is not a self-executing treaty and it therefore requires that States Parties take a number of steps at the national level to make it operational and enforce its provisions. Our assessment so far is that more
needs to be done before we reach a stage that can be deemed satisfactory. Many Member States are still lagging behind both in terms of implementing and enforcing national legislation and customs controls, and in other important areas. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to reiterate to all Member States that we are ready and willing to provide all the necessary assistance, through our implementation-support programmes, to all those who request it.

With regard to universality, we have very encouraging news.

I am pleased to report that the OPCW now comprises 166 Member States, and the list of States not Party is getting tantalisingly smaller.

Since my last visit to this Committee, the Convention has been strengthened by the accession of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, which last December acknowledged that it possessed chemical weapons. Since its accession, it has started disarming under the round-the-clock supervision of our international inspectorate. Soon, our Executive Council will consider a request by the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya for conversion of a former chemical weapons production facility, which, if the Council approves the request, will be used to produce pharmaceuticals once conversion is complete.

With its accession, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, the neighbouring region, and the Middle East as a whole, have become safer. Iraq has recently indicated to us its political commitment to the Convention and the decision of the interim Iraqi Government to prepare the ground for early accession to the Convention once the newly elected government takes office next year.
Important progress has also been registered in Africa, the Pacific, and the Caribbean. A few States remain outside the realm of the Convention, and we sincerely hope it will be possible for them to join us in the near future.

Justified concerns remain about the Korean Peninsula and the Middle East, where large and long-standing conflicts persist. Many believe that we should give up on these regions and let the situations evolve towards a point, in some distant future, when accession to the Convention will no longer be a problem.

Nothing could be farther from our thinking. Adherence to the Convention would constitute, in any area in the world fraught with tension, a significant confidence-building gesture. No one can expect that any sympathy or understanding should be shown to those who decide to keep the use of chemical-weapons as an option. Chemical weapons are a heinous means of terror and destruction, aimed at and useful only against unprotected civilians. They have been proscribed by a multilaterally negotiated, non-discriminatory convention. What could justify refraining from joining this treaty?

Dear colleagues,

Destruction of chemical weapons continues under the verification regime set out in the Convention.

Six declared possessor States Parties have, to date, declared more than 71,000 tonnes of chemical agents and nearly 8.7 million munitions and containers. In the United States of America, more than 30% of the arsenal has been destroyed, and new destruction facilities are coming on line in a commendable effort to meet the strict deadlines set out in the Convention.
India is fast approaching the point at which it will have destroyed fully 80% of its stockpile, and its destruction campaign is thus running ahead of schedule. For this, India deserves our fullest praise.

The Russian Federation, which possesses the largest arsenal of chemical weapons, is now moving ahead after some initial delays, thanks to the resolve of its government and the essential support of the international community through important initiatives such as the Global Partnership. It is true that much more needs to be done in Russia, as we move towards the strict deadlines set out for the overall destruction process in the Convention.

Albania has declared a small arsenal, inherited from the Cold War days. We have started working with the Albanian authorities and hope that everything will soon be in place for a smooth and short destruction campaign.

As I stated, the deadlines set out in the Convention are fast approaching, and this means that the number of destruction facilities will grow in the near future. That in turn will require a concomitant increase in verification activity by the Secretariat, as we see to it that we are present at all the required stages of destruction and can thus provide the full assurance the international community needs that disarmament is indeed complete and irreversible.

We are also continuing our efforts in industry verification, bearing in mind that the non-proliferation of chemical weapons is another major part of our mandate. In this area we are also taking steps to ensure that no deviations from legitimate uses are possible. This work is
especially important given the present security situation and the ever-present threat of chemical terrorism.

In this regard let me say we have continued to make our contribution to the work of the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee. Last year I indicated that we were ready to play our role in line with UNSC Resolutions 1368 and 1373. We have also noted with satisfaction that, by adopting Resolution 1540 this past April on the prevention of access to non-state actors to weapons of mass destruction, the UN Security Council has explicitly recognised the role and responsibilities of the OPCW in this important domain. The Resolution enhances our own responsibility in this crucial task and universalises a good deal of the obligations already present in the Convention.

Responding to a letter from the Chairman of the Committee on Resolution 1540, His Excellency I. Motoc of Romania, I have confirmed our readiness to provide any technical assistance and advice that are required. The Technical Secretariat of the OPCW is fully at the disposal of the Committee, which, I am convinced, has much to benefit from our practical experience after seven years of verification activity.

In the same spirit we have continued our close ongoing cooperation with the UN through the Department for Disarmament Affairs, now firmly established under the leadership of Ambassador Abe. In the past year we have not only consulted frequently with the UNDDA, but also cooperated in the field through our regular participation in meetings organised by it or the UN Regional Centres.

The relationship still has room to grow, and we intend to build even closer links with the UN and
its specialised agencies and regional organisations. We are doing this in particular in the fight against international terrorism, where we have detected a keen interest, spurred by genuine need, in joining forces against this new challenge to international peace and security.

Mr Chairman,

Like the struggles for liberty and justice, the pursuit of peace requires our constant attention.

In our own humble way, we must make our contribution and pursue at all times the goal of international peace and security through disarmament.

The OPCW is playing the role mandated to it in this effort by pursuing both the prohibition of chemical weapons everywhere and their elimination from the face of the Earth. We will persist in this crucial task until we have achieved the goals of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Thank you very much.