STATEMENT
by
TURKEY

at
the THEMATIC DISCUSSION
on OTHER WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION
of the First Committee of the 70th Session
of the United Nations General Assembly

22 October 2015, New York
Mr Chairman,

Since Turkey’s clear position on and its strong support to nuclear disarmament have already been expressed in this room during the relevant thematic discussion, today I will elaborate on my country’s stance vis-à-vis two particular categories of WMD, namely chemical and biological/toxin weapons.

Turkey is a party to the 1925 Geneva Protocol, the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), and The Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC), which are all important components of the global system against WMD proliferation.

In full observance of its international commitments, Turkey does not possess or develop any such weapons nor conducts any research on them. Turkey also reiterates its call for a wider adherence to, and an effective implementation of these Conventions. We will continue to actively support efforts aimed at promoting the implementation and universalization of these instruments.

Mr Chairman,

The existence of chemical weapons in the world and especially in the Middle East has been a major concern for Turkey, the region and the international community as a whole. Unfortunately, chemical weapons were used during three conflicts (*Iran-Iraq War, Northern Iraq and in Syria*) in our immediate neighbourhood in the past three decades. The most recent case being Syria.

The reports of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria and the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) in 2014 had clearly indicated the use of chlorine gas as a chemical weapon "systematically and repeatedly" by the Syrian regime within a 10-day period in April 2014, which was a grave breach of the CWC and Security Council resolution 2118 (2013).

Emboldened by the absence of firm action by the international community, the perpetrators of these attacks continued their campaign of mass
punishment by chemical weapons against their own citizens, as the Third Report of the OPCW Fact Finding Mission has clearly established.

We have observed repeated use of chemical weapons, in the form of chlorine and/or phosgene gas, in and around Idlib city during the course of March and April 2015. This led to the Security Council Resolution 2235 and hence the establishment of UN-OPCW Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM).

We hope that JIM will serve as an effective instrument in holding accountable those responsible for these horrific acts. It is our firm expectation that the JIM will be able to address the OPCW-FFM reports without further delay.

We also would like to reaffirm that it is Turkey’s solemn expectation that all allegations regarding the use of chemical weapons in our neighbourhood be thoroughly investigated and perpetrators be brought to justice.

Mr. Chairman,

It will be recalled that last year, Turkey joined other member states in commending the difficult task the UN-OPCW Joint Mission had done in order to dismantle the Syrian regime’s chemical weapons programme and eliminate the declared amount of chemical weapons and precursors stockpiles. Under life-threatening conditions, the UN and OPCW personnel made extraordinary efforts to eliminate Syria’s declared chemical stockpiles. This has been an important reminder of the significance of the universalization and effective implementation of the CWC, as well as the key role of the OPCW in this endeavour.

Mr. Chairman,

Turkey also attaches great importance to the BTWC, its universalization and full implementation. This year is the 40th anniversary of the entry into force of the BTCW, which makes the Meeting of State Parties on 14-18 December more important. The spread and transfer of dual-use goods and technology that can be used to produce biological weapons and the possibility of them falling into the hands of terrorists are major concerns for
the international community. Coupled with other weapons of mass destruction, the fact that those agents are so easy to attain, has made such concerns all the more significant. Confidence-building measures remain an important instrument to promote the purpose of the BTWC. Although considerably improved, the submission of reports has not increased to a desirable level. CBM reports are valuable tools for mutual understanding and transparency. We should strive to make tangible use of this source of information.

We also believe that scientific and technological developments should also be taken into account. Awareness of the innovations in life sciences, as well as their implications for the BTWC is necessary to address the complex challenges in this area.

Unfortunately, unlike the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention lacks a verification regime. We consider that the development of such a mechanism, to the extent possible, would contribute to the strengthening of the Convention’s effectiveness.

Mr. Chairman,

The international community must continue to do its best to prevent the acquisition of biological and chemical warfare agents by terrorists, other unauthorized actors or even irresponsible States, and for their stockpiles to be destroyed. In this context, the universalization and effective implementation of both the CWC and the BTWC must be a priority. We call on all countries to ratify and implement these two important instruments. We also support the strengthening of the implementation of Resolution 1540, which is a key instrument in preventing the acquisition of WMDs and their means of delivery by non-state actors.

In this context, regional approaches that pave the way for eventual universality should be utilized. Turkey has been actively promoting the establishment of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East. We, once again would like to reflect the general sense of disappointment that the 2012 Conference could not be held, and our expectation for it to be convened as soon as possible.
We urge all States in the region to participate in those efforts, in a spirit of cooperation and flexibility.

Thank you.