



**The Chemical Weapons Convention 1997-2017: Progress, Challenges, and
Reinforcing the Global Norm against Chemical Weapons**

Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu

**High Representative for Disarmament Affairs
United Nations**



20 June, 2017
Washington D.C.

Acting Assistant Secretary of State Friedt
Director-General Üzümcü
Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

I want to thank the US State Department for hosting today's event. The re-emergence of chemical weapons used by States and non-state actors alike is one of the most alarming developments in international security. This dangerous trend is threatening to undermine the global disarmament and non-proliferation regime. Forums such as this provide opportunities to devise ways in which to reverse that trend and bolster our key institutional defence against these horrific weapons – the Chemical Weapons Convention.

The United States has been a standard bearer against the use of chemicals as weapons and a redoubtable defender of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

I also want to take the opportunity to thank Director-General Üzümcü for his years of dedicated service to the OPCW and for the friendship and support he has shown to the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs.

Recent events have highlighted just how important it is to have partnerships like the one that exists between committed Member States, the OPCW and the UN.

If I may, I would like to start with a quote:

If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie; Dulce et Decorum est
Pro patria mori

These words, in the famous poem written by Wilfred Owen one hundred years ago, reflect the horror and disgust at chemical weapons after their first large scale use on the battlefield.

For nearly a century, humanity has rightfully abhorred these weapons. The CWC, the product of nearly ten years of negotiations, represents humanity's firm belief that any use of chemical weapons is unacceptable.

Ninety-five percent of over 72,000 metric tonnes declared chemical warfare agents have now been destroyed, thanks to the hard work of the OPCW and its inspectors. Despite some delays, this is a major achievement in fulfilling their obligations under the CWC by the Possessing States Parties.

The CWC demonstrates the tangible security benefits that multilateral disarmament instruments provide. It is inarguable that the world is a safer place because of the Convention and the Organisation tasked with its implementation.

It checks just about every box required of a multilateral treaty – it is comprehensive, legally-binding, irreversible, verifiable and *almost* universal. Only four countries remain outside of its ambit.

Five years ago the use of chemical weapons was all but unimaginable. Now it is a regular occurrence. A range of challenges to the Convention have arisen, driven by a deteriorating international security environment – especially in the Middle East, the rise of dangerous non-state actors capable of taking and holding territory, and evolutions in technology and the life sciences.

The most obvious and immediate challenge facing the health of the CWC is the repeated and brazen use of chemical weapons or toxic chemicals as weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic. Every instance breaks the taboo against chemical weapons use and by extension damages the CWC. If we fail to both identify the perpetrators of chemical weapon attacks and hold them accountable, that damage will be compounded by an order of magnitude.

Consistent and active support for the OPCW, its fact finding mission teams and for the UN-OPCW Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) is the best way to prevent such an outcome. Unanimity of purpose among the international community must be maintained, regardless of whether the perpetrator is a state or a non-state actor.

If we are to prevent the continued use of chemical weapons in Syria from being the thin end of the wedge, every State needs to hold the line. There are already troubling signs that the use of chemical weapons is not confined to one region. The allegations of VX use by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in Malaysia should be enough to give anyone nightmares. The potential for chemical weapons to become an asymmetrical weapon of terror needs to be stamped out immediately.

In this context, universality is a pressing concern. Events in the Syrian Arab Republic, Iraq and Malaysia vividly demonstrated why renewed efforts must be made to universalise the CWC. I admit that this will not be easy but we should not conflate 'difficult' with 'impossible'. I believe the time is right for a reinvigorated universalisation campaign – a campaign in which the United States could play a leading role.

It is also vital that all States Parties effectively and dully implement all their commitments under the Convention.

Inconsistencies in Syria's declaration are a further challenge to the Convention. This is an unprecedented situation but one that, thanks to the skill and dedication of OPCW staff,

can be resolved. It requires a cooperative approach – the OPCW wants to work with the Syrian government to resolve the situation. Without this cooperation, the international community cannot have confidence that Syria is abiding by its commitments. I would ask that all States Parties to the CWC encourage Syria to continue its cooperation, including through a fourth round of high-level consultations.

Going forward, I believe there are two issues that could have long-term effects on the CWC and, more broadly, the international disarmament and non-proliferation regime.

The first relates to the objective and professional nature of the OPCW technical secretariat, and its importance to the overall disarmament regime. I assumed the position of High Representative only seven weeks ago, but already I have observed a worrying seepage of politics into what should be strictly technical discussions.

Both the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission and the UN – OPCW Joint Investigative Mechanism have been the epitome of objective impartiality. Of the many allegations regarding the use of chemical weapons, the technical experts at the OPCW and its FFM have been able to independently confirm 30 such instances. The JIM has been able to reach a conclusion as to the actors involved in four cases – the JIM determined that the Syrian Arab Armed Forces had been involved in the use of toxic chemicals as weapons in three incidents and that the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) used chemical weapons in one incident.

The JIM is now investigating the use of sulphur mustard in the village of Um Housh in Aleppo governorate on 16 September 2016. The JIM is also assessing information related to the Khan Shaykhun incident where sarin was reportedly used on 4 April 2017. In accordance with its working methods, the JIM Leadership Panel will consider launching an investigation into that incident once the FFM issues its conclusions.

This is indeed an extremely challenging task. I am confident in the JIM's ability to fulfil its mandate in an independent, impartial and professional manner. The outcome of the JIM's work is as good as the quality of information that it obtains. Therefore, the Secretary-General, the OPCW Director-General, the head of the JIM, Mr. Edmond Mulet, and I call upon all to provide as much information as possible to allow the JIM to professionally assess and corroborate all such information and identify perpetrators. The JIM will make use of all the state-of-the-art forensic, geospatial and scientific analysis capabilities.

The work of both the OPCW FFM and the JIM is crucial to re-establishing the taboo against the use of chemical weapons and bringing to justice the perpetrators of these crimes against humanity. It is work that must be sacrosanct and not held hostage to political motivations.

Challenges to the OPCW's technical authority undermine the international community's ability to rely on the advice of scientific and other professionals. In today's security environment, such advice is needed more than ever.

And the ripple effects could damage the entire disarmament and non-proliferation regime. As you are all aware, this regime is a complex matrix of mutually reinforcing instruments – from treaties to UN Security Council resolutions to codes of conduct to technical agencies and inspectorates such as the OPCW and the International Atomic Energy Agency. The erosion of one detrimentally affects the whole.

The benefits of disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation go beyond the normative. They have played a central role in easing international tensions and building confidence and trust among States. Confidence and trust-building are key ingredients for security and sustaining peace. Technical agencies, such as the OPCW, undergird that confidence by acting as an honest broker and verifying that commitments are being met.

Allowing the impartial role of these agencies to be undermined effectively undermines the instruments they represent.

So for the sake of both the immediate benefits – protecting the taboo against chemical weapons – and the long-term – sustaining the health of the regime – I urge you to both actively and vocally support the professionals staffing both the OPCW FFM and the JIM.

The second long-term challenge I want to highlight relates to technological and scientific challenges.

It is clear that we are in the middle of a technological boom not seen since the industrial revolution. We are witnessing advances in science across all fields, including the life sciences. These developments will affect the CWC and it is our responsibility to ensure that the Convention is adaptable enough to cope with advances that have consequences we might not even grasp yet.

For example, take the burgeoning convergence in chemistry and biology. While the overlap between the sciences has been understood for some time – both the BWC and CWC include toxins – there is an increased blurring of lines. The chemical manipulation of viruses or the synthesis of entire microbial genomes are just two examples of scientific convergence. Nor are these long-term concerns, they are happening now.

Sciences resist being fit neatly into separate and distinct categories, and we must be equally flexible in response. This is a multi-stakeholder concern that requires input from academia and industry as well as States. Building modes of communication and dialogue with the scientific community should be a priority.

At the same time, the use of toxic chemicals as weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic is a stark reminder of the need to address the challenges posed by the potential dual use of existing chemicals – many chemicals widely used for peaceful and commercial purposes can, unfortunately, be used as weapons.

The rights of States to the peaceful development and application of chemistry under the CWC is inviolable. The support provided by the OPCW in fields as diverse as agriculture, medicine and industry is invaluable. However, recent events have shown that the possibility of misuse cannot be ignored.

The emergence of potentially enabling technologies capable of defeating counter-proliferation measures, such as additive manufacturing techniques like 3D printing, genome editing, and the intangible transfer of technology via the internet, has further exacerbated this threat.

If the economic and developmental benefits delivered by the CWC are to be sustained, the OPCW must be vigilant in monitoring emerging technologies. The OPCW's Scientific Advisory Board has, to date, done an admirable job of this, but as challenges mount they will require support.

The OPCW could also give due consideration on how to strike a balance in which new technologies and methods are developed with maximum transparency but minimal commercial loss. This too will require enhanced cooperation with the chemical industry, which I know is already a significant focus of the OPCW's activities under the Convention's non-proliferation pillar.

In the twenty years since its entry into force, the CWC has been a bastion of multilateral disarmament and non-proliferation. For it to remain so it requires the utmost support from its members. I hope the United States will continue to play a leadership role in the Convention and set an example by working expeditiously to destroy the last vestiges of its chemical weapon stockpile.

Going forward, if we are to re-establish and reinforce the taboo against the use of chemical weapons, we will need to use all of the tools at our disposal. The CWC is chief among these, but it should work seamlessly with other instruments such as UN Security Council resolution 1540 (2004) and the Secretary-General's Mechanism for investigation of alleged use of chemical, biological and toxin weapons. We should continue to look for points of intersection with the Biological Weapons Convention, the newly established United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, and the Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate. A complex security environment demands an efficient, streamlined and holistic response.

In 1925, the Geneva Protocol stated that “the use in war of asphyxiating, poisonous or other gases, and of all analogous liquids, materials or devices, has been justly condemned by the general opinion of the civilized world.” Nearly one hundred years later we must continue

to act in accordance with that view. We cannot go backwards. The Chemical Weapons Convention rightly calls upon us “to exclude completely the possibility of the use of chemical weapons”. Such use remains wholly indefensible and is a threat to international peace and security. Those responsible for their use must be held accountable. Many things have changed in the years since 1925; this view of chemical weapons should not be one of them.

Thank you.