Message to the Twenty-Second Conference of States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention

Delivered by

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His Excellency, Ambassador Abdelouahab Bellouki, Chairperson of the Conference
His Excellency, Director-General Ahmet Üzümcü,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

At the outset, on behalf of the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, I would like to thank Director-General Üzümcü and the staff of the Technical Secretariat of the Organisation for the Prohibition for Chemical Weapons (OPCW) for their longstanding and invaluable partnership with the United Nations and with the Office for Disarmament Affairs, in particular. Although this relationship has always been strong, it has deepened over the past several years, sadly as a result of tragic events with which we are all too familiar.

This year marked the twentieth anniversary of the Chemical Weapons Convention. The last two decades have seen much accomplished in pursuit of the elimination of chemical weapons. The Convention is nearly universal and 96% of the world’s declared stockpile of chemical agent has been destroyed. Earlier this year, the Russian Federation completed the destruction of its chemical weapons stockpile, which was a major milestone in the achievement of the goals of the Convention.

In addition, the cooperation with industry, and other efforts to facilitate the technological and economic benefits of chemistry, has continued. I commend the work of the OPCW in addressing current and future challenges in this regard. Progress has also been made in relation to the destruction of Libya’s remaining category 2 chemical weapons.

However, many of these accomplishments have been overshadowed by the continuing allegations of chemical weapons use. Such uses are a violation of international law and rightly shock the conscience of the world.

Recently, the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism submitted its seventh report to the Security Council. The findings contained in that report, in addition to those contained in previous reports of the Mechanism, should be of the deepest concern to us all.
Equally concerning is the fact that the mandate of the Mechanism expired on 17 November. In speaking of the attack at Khan Shaykhun, Secretary-General António Guterres stated that “there needs to be accountability for such crimes, in line with existing international norms and Security Council resolutions.” And yet, there is now no Mechanism that is mandated to identify the perpetrators, creating the impression that those who wish to use such weapons are free to do so with impunity. The consequences of inaction may be far-reaching and severe.

The Secretary-General has previously expressed the hope that States, particularly those in the Security Council, can show the necessary unity to ensure that the taboo against the use of chemical weapons suffers no further damage. Such unity has been displayed, to great effect, in the past – including on this issue. It is once again necessary.

I would like to close by recalling the adoption, by the Executive Council in October, of a draft decision to be submitted to this session of the Conference regarding the appointment of Ambassador Fernando Arias, of Spain, as the next Director-General of the OPCW and take this opportunity to assure him of the full support of the Office for Disarmament Affairs. I would also like to extend my sincere thanks to the professionalism and commitment of Director-General Üzümcü during his tenure.

Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,

Please accept my best wishes for a productive conference, and allow me to reiterate the full commitment of the United Nations to its partnership with the OPCW.