Statement to the Fiftieth Session of the Executive Council of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)

Ambassador Eric M. Javits, Head of the U.S. Delegation
The Hague, Netherlands
September 25, 2007

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Director-General, distinguished delegates:

It is once again a pleasure to see so many cherished friends and colleagues gathered in this chamber. I want to extend a warm welcome to the new delegates, especially new ambassadors who are attending their first Executive Council session. I look forward to working with each of you constructively and amicably. I am sorry to note the unexpected departure of Ambassador Alfonso Dastis. We are losing an outstanding diplomat and colleague, who has been extraordinarily generous with his time and talent in multiple capacities at the OPCW. I am particularly glad to see one familiar face here again today, Ambassador Romeo Arguelles, it is good to see you back in the chair. I am sure that your congenial wisdom and able leadership will guide us through this Council session successfully. I gladly pledge to you my full support, and that of my entire delegation, for the coming week, and throughout your tenure as Chairman.

We have a very full agenda this week. But before I turn to the work at hand, there are some recent and upcoming events I would like to mention:

First, I wish to commend Albania, the first possessor State Party to complete destruction of its chemical weapons stockpile, for a job well done. We still have a long way to go to reach a world without chemical weapons, but we are one step closer.

I would also like to thank the Dutch authorities for hosting an extensive challenge inspection exercise earlier this month. This was valuable not only for the Technical Secretariat, but also for members of the Council. Challenge inspection is a sensitive topic for some in our organization, and I recognize that. I do not think anyone in this chamber takes it lightly. But we must all recognize that one day this organization may be called upon to conduct a challenge inspection or an investigation of alleged use of chemical weapons. If that happens, we must be ready. The ability to conduct such a mission effectively and without delay will speak volumes about the credibility of this organization, and is critical to ensuring the confidence of States Parties. This is why exercises such as the one hosted by our Dutch colleagues are so valuable.

Yesterday, you were briefed on the status of the U.S. chemical weapons destruction program. Next month, the United States is pleased to be hosting a visit by representatives of the Executive Council to the Anniston Chemical Agent Disposal Facility. This visit will be the first in a series over the coming years, as agreed by the 11th Conference of the States Parties. These visits will help the Council to monitor and document progress towards complete destruction of our chemical weapons stockpile. Anniston is an incineration facility, and is currently processing VX-filled projectiles. This will be an excellent opportunity for members of the Council to learn more about our chemical weapons destruction program, and to gain an appreciation for what a complex, difficult task we face. Joining the Council representatives on this visit will be Dr. Arthur Hopkins, Assistant to the Secretary of Defense for Nuclear, Chemical and Biological Defense Programs; Ambassador Donald Mahley, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for International Security and Nonproliferation; and Mr. Dale Ormond, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army for Elimination of Chemical Weapons.

Fellow delegates, let me turn to the business immediately at hand. In our long agenda, a few items stand out as particularly important: issues on which we must provide clear, useful recommendations to the Conference of the States Parties.

Under the able guidance of our budget co-facilitators, Diana Gosens of the Netherlands and Donggy Lee of the Republic of Korea, we have thoroughly analyzed the Director-General's proposed zero nominal growth budget for 2008. This is a good budget. It could be improved: for example, the proportion of OCPF facilities inspected is still too low—a little over 2 percent. That's too low to give us much hope of detecting, or even deterring, potential violations. Nevertheless, the United States hopes that it will be possible for the Council to reach rapid agreement on the 2008 budget. There are very few issues in this budget. It would be unfortunate if the Council fell back into old habits and failed to complete its work on the budget before the Conference of the States Parties in November. Recent adjustments in the estimates for chemical weapons destruction monitoring, and related proposals from the Director-General, will require some hard work this week to address, but I assure you, my delegation has come ready to work.

Another important item is the Director-General's comprehensive report on the status of implementation of Article VII of the Convention. The 11th Conference of the States Parties has directed us to transmit this report, together with our recommendations, to the upcoming Conference. This is an important report, dealing with an issue of longstanding concern. The first decision urging States Parties to take steps to fulfill their national implementation obligations was adopted at the 5th Conference of the States Parties in 1992. Since then, the Convention has been ratified by 188 States Parties, and the majority of States Parties are in the process of implementing the Convention. Nevertheless, the full potential of the Convention has not yet been realized. It is once again a pleasure to see so many cherished friends and colleagues gathered in this chamber. I want to extend a warm welcome to the new delegates, especially new ambassadors who are attending their first Executive Council session. I look forward to working with each of you constructively and amicably. I am sorry to note the unexpected departure of Ambassador Alfonso Dastis. We are losing an outstanding diplomat and colleague, who has been extraordinarily generous with his time and talent in multiple capacities at the OPCW. I am particularly glad to see one familiar face here again today, Ambassador Romeo Arguelles, it is good to see you back in the chair. I am sure that your congenial wisdom and able leadership will guide us through this Council session successfully. I gladly pledge to you my full support, and that of my entire delegation, for the coming week, and throughout your tenure as Chairman.

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http://www.state.gov/t/isn/rls/rm/94978.htm
We share a collective interest in seeing each State Party enact and implement comprehensive legislation. Whenever another State Party does so, another gap is closed, and our collective security is enhanced. For this reason, while we rely heavily on the Technical Secretariat’s work on Article VII implementation, it is prudent to also take initiatives of our own. The United States encourages all States Parties to seek opportunities to engage and assist those States Parties that are still working toward full implementation. In particular, we should first seek to assist those States which have activities subject to OPCW oversight within their borders, such as the manufacturing and trade of organic chemicals.

Fellow delegates, this is the last regularly scheduled Council session before the CSP. We must do our utmost to reach decisions on the long list of items before us. I realize that we face fundamental disagreement on some important issues. However, I am concerned that the increasingly lengthy list of issues which we have deferred, often repeatedly, has generated a backlog that threatens our ability to function effectively.

Sometimes, there really is no choice but to defer a decision. And sometimes, it saves time and facilitates the work of the Council to do this without an extended debate if there is no prospect that that debate will change instructions from capitals or lead to resolution. And, yes, the United States has often requested that items be deferred. But the increasingly long list of repeatedly deferred items is worrisome. We have, to cite just one example, a proposal to add spectra to the OPCW Analytical Database that has been deferred time and again, without serious discussion, and eventually just dropped off our agenda without ever being addressed. That proposal is two years old, and the Council has not yet taken a decision or even sought to identify and address concerns. Special meetings of the Council just before or even during the annual Conference, convened to gavel through the decisions we were not able to reach in a full year of regular sessions, have become accepted practice. Deferring issues, without any substantive discussion of the underlying concerns or possible solutions, is a habit that we have collectively fallen into -- and we need to kick the habit.

In October, at my urging, Columbia University in New York will host a symposium in celebration of the tenth anniversary of the Convention. A distinguished panel will discuss the topic of Effective Multilateralism as exemplified by the OPCW. I do believe that the OPCW is such an example. Consensus decision-making can be slow and unwieldy; at times, it can be frustrating; but this Council has proven its ability to work constructively, in a collegial atmosphere, and find practical solutions to problems. That has served us well so far, and I hope it will again this week.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished colleagues, let me reiterate my personal commitment to work with all of you in a spirit of mutual cooperation. If we all remain devoted to the principle of consensus arrived at through tolerant and patient exchange of views, I am confident that we will successfully reach decisions on the key matters before us, and demonstrate, as we have in the past, that “effective multilateralism” is certainly not a contradiction in terms. Thank you.

Released on November 13, 2007