Mr Chair,

Allow me to congratulate you on your election to the Chair of the First Committee, and to thank you for the opportunity for the OPCW to participate in today’s high-level exchange.

1. When I last briefed this Committee, the OPCW had just embarked on an historic mission to eliminate Syrian chemical weapons, in partnership with the United Nations. This was an unprecedented challenge – never before had a major WMD arsenal of any sort been removed from a country at war and destroyed in such compressed timeframes.

Now, only one year later, we can point to significant accomplishments by this mission.

2. After delays occasioned largely by the security situation in Syria, all declared chemicals – some 1,300 metric tonnes – were removed from Syrian territory on 23 June.

Since then, destruction of all Category 1 chemicals – totalling 1,040 metric tonnes – was completed before the end of August.

3. 88% of remaining Category 2 chemicals – largely toxic industrial chemicals – have been destroyed at commercial and government facilities in Finland, Germany, the United States and United Kingdom.

In total, some 98% of Syria’s declared chemicals have so far been destroyed.

Mr Chair,

4. This is a remarkable achievement, by any measure – let alone in the context of such a rare and testing opportunity. It is vital, therefore, that we draw lessons from this experience, if we are to respond to future opportunities in the right way, with the right resources.

5. First and foremost, the Syria mission has proven the resilience of the Chemical Weapons Convention. It provided a ready-made, tried-and-tested vehicle for ridding the world of a major chemical arsenal, with full verification.

6. Secondly, our success has been underpinned by an extraordinary collective international effort. The willingness of more than 30 of our States Parties to provide both in-kind and financial assistance was crucial, as was our
partnership with the United Nations in dealing with logistical and security challenges that our inspectors had previously not had to deal with.

7. This collaboration has been continuing since the closure of the OPCW-UN Joint Mission on 30 September through new arrangements negotiated with the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS).

8. Finally, working together, we were able to overcome obstacles by coming up with novel technical solutions. These included facilitating sea-based destruction through the installation of two Field Deployable Hydrolysis Systems on board the Cape Ray, and the use of GPS-mounted cameras for remote verification at sites in Syria to which the Joint Mission was unable to gain physical access.

9. There still remains important work to be done in finalising arrangements for the destruction of chemical weapon production facilities in Syria. The OPCW is working closely with the Syrian Government, UNOPS and commercial contractors to get destruction underway as quickly as possible.

10. And we are continuing to follow up allegations of chlorine gas attacks in Syria through the work of the Fact-Finding Mission, established by the Director-General on 29 April.

11. Following a serious incident on 27 May, in which an IED destroyed an armoured vehicle transporting members of the Mission, arrangements were made for witness testimonies to be collected in a safe location outside of Syria.

12. This has been done, and the second report of the Mission was issued on 10 September. Disturbingly, it concludes, with a high degree of confidence, that chlorine was used as a weapon systematically and repeatedly in three villages in northern Syria.

13. Clearly, the challenge in Syria compelled us to surge the capacities of both the OPCW and our States Parties. But we were able to do so in a highly effective way by virtue of the OPCW's well-practised verification regime and contingency planning.

14. That said, as important as this mission has been, we have not lost sight of the need to address new and emerging challenges – challenges that we all face in relation to WMD disarmament.

15. The confirmed use of chemical weapons near Damascus in August last year has made clear that our success can only be as broad as our reach. Accordingly, we have refocused our efforts, with States Parties, to achieve universal adherence to the CWC – efforts which are now bearing fruit.

16. Myanmar is well advanced in its ratification process. We hope also that Angola will follow through on its commitment to accede, especially in view of its election to the UN Security Council for the 2015-16 term. And we are
hopeful that South Sudan might soon be in a position to re-engage on the CWC.

17. Other States not party have been less responsive to outreach by the OPCW and States Parties on this important issue. We will nonetheless continue to engage them bilaterally and through international fora, especially the United Nations. More broadly, the OPCW continues to make good progress.

18. To date, 85% of declared chemical weapons have been verified as destroyed, and industry inspections have continued apace at 241 per year, notwithstanding the added strains imposed by the Syria mission.

19. But with the goal of a world free of chemical weapons now very much within our reach, we must now do more to make our disarmament gains permanent. This means ensuring we have mechanisms in place to prevent the re-emergence of such weapons in the future.

20. To this end, we have worked with our States Parties to improve national implementation of their CWC obligations, especially in ensuring that they have relevant legislation in place.

21. The Technical Secretariat has increased its focus on training specialists in emergency assistance, and continued to develop tailored activities in relation to assistance and protection and international cooperation on peaceful uses of chemistry in all regions.

22. We are also looking to expand our cooperation with other international organisations to develop new synergies. For example, verification challenges in Syria saw the OPCW consult closely with the IAEA on the employment of remote technologies and other techniques.

23. The overarching message from all this activity is that we need to build more, better and more broadly based capacity to underwrite global non-proliferation efforts. And we need to do this in a holistic way that shows the clear security and economic benefits of international cooperation in this area.

24. At the same time, the OPCW has sought to broaden our community of stakeholders – not only to monitor advances in science and technology through more effective partnerships with science and industry, but also to nurture practices of responsible science through education.

25. The OPCW-The Hague Award was also instituted earlier this year, funded in part by the Nobel Peace Prize money, as a vehicle for recognising achievement in advancing the goals of the CWC.

26. The year 2015 will mark an important event in the history of chemical warfare and disarmament – the centenary anniversary of the first large-scale use of chemical weapons near Ieper in Belgium during World War One. We will
work closely with States Parties, other arms control and disarmament organisations, civil society and academia to use this anniversary to highlight the important ongoing work in preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons.

27. Certainly, the changing strategic environment will only serve to sharpen our focus, whether on how new advances in science, technology and communication might challenge implementation of the CWC, or on how to address the proliferation risk posed by non-state actors.

Mr Chair,

28. The role of the United Nations and its support to the OPCW remain a key element of our multilateral success. And as we have seen over the past year, our partnership has also underpinned our joint success in a rare opportunity to rid the world of a major remaining chemical arsenal – that of Syria.

29. We hope that valuable lessons can be learned about the need to be responsive, flexible and innovative in rising to such opportunities in the interests of advancing global peace and security.

30. We also hope that these lessons can lead to a better appreciation of the challenges facing the OPCW as we shift from disarmament-focused activities towards strengthened non-proliferation efforts.

31. Finally, we hope that these lessons can serve as an example for disarmament efforts further afield.

Thank you for your attention.