

Qatar organises course for GCC customs officials

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The fourth sub-regional training course for customs authorities in the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) countries on the technical aspects of the "Transfer Regime of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC)" opened yesterday at Doha La Cigale Hotel.

The course, which is organised by the National Committee for the Prohibition of Weapons (NCPW) in co-operation with the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), is being held under the auspices of HE the Chief of Staff of the Qatari Armed Forces Major General Hamad bin Ali al-Attiyah.

The course will discuss several issues, including an introduction on OPCW, principles and procedures governing the transportation of chemicals and means of identification of chemical and biological warfare agents.

In his opening speech, Brig. Gen. (Pilot) Nasser Mohamed al-Ali, chairman of the Qatar National Committee for the Prohibition of Weapons, stressed Qatar's keenness to organise such courses for the representatives of GCC Customs as they are geographically contiguous, and that the leakage of any of the materials used in chemical weapons to any of the GCC territory will affect the security of the rest of the GCC states.

The NCPW believes in the importance of the customs sector's role in the implementation and effectiveness of the convention as it is one of the main facilities in the countries, he said.

Al-Ali said the customs sector is a manifestation of the state's sovereignty over its territory and its invincible fortress to protect it from smuggling of chemical weapons, banned substances and the illicit trade.

He also warned that while protecting the country is the responsibility of everyone, the customs inspectors are considered the first line of defence.

The State of Qatar ratified the Chemical Weapons Convention on August 13, 1997, and thus it is one of the first countries supporting the international efforts towards achieving the universality of the convention, al-Ali noted.

The National Committee for the Prohibition of Weapons was established by the Council of Ministers' decision no. 26 of the year 2004, he said.

Brig. Gen. (Pilot) Nasser Mohamed al-Ali pointed out that the themes and topics which will be covered during the course will contribute to building human capacity in the GCC countries, stressing at the same time the Organisation's continuing co-operation with the OPCW.

Meanwhile, al-Ali thanked those in charge of the organisation on easing the task of states' parties to fulfil their national obligations towards the implementation of the convention.

For his part, head of Implementation Support Branch of OPCW Mark Albon thanked Qatar for hosting the course for the fourth year, stressing that the convention on the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons is one of the most important international legal tool to remove weapons of mass destruction.

Albon noted in his speech at the opening session that he and over the past 15 years focused on the destruction of these weapons in the nuclear-weapon states, pointing out that this effort was achieved by 70%, which is a historic success.

He also noted that the deadline for destruction of chemical weapons ends on April 29, 2012, but it will be extended for the countries that will not meet its destruction deadline.

He stressed the need of focusing during the next phase to prevent countries that their chemical weapons were destroyed to obtain them again, and this is the role of customs.

This course is based on the important role played by customs authorities in GCC countries with regard to the Convention on the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, where those authorities work as strong barriers to protect the concerned territory of the GCC countries from the risk of chemicals.