



Mayor

**Statement on the occasion of the Day of Remembrance for All Victims of Chemical Warfare**

War is not something which just happens. War is the result of human actions. Or the failure to take action. It is still astonishing to see what human beings are capable of. The past century has provided us with some particularly horrific examples of this. On the one hand, there has been enormous progress. We not only opened up the world, but also explored the universe. New medicines save the lives of people who would have died in the past. And the internet has transformed our lives. But it seems that this same human ingenuity is always capable of devising new and better ways of persecuting and killing people, rather than saving them.

Take chemical weapons, for example, which appear to have been devised to ensure that people die the most terrible death imaginable. Weapons that people can hardly protect themselves against. Recent history has provided the sad evidence that it is the most vulnerable who fall victim to chemical weapons. Not professionally-trained and adequately protected soldiers but civilians, like you and me. Ordinary women and men and, most of all, children. And the life of anyone who does manage to survive such an attack is ruined forever. Men in the prime of their lives, are turned into physical wrecks. Decades later, women are still giving birth to severely disabled children.

The moment when the Chemical Weapons Convention entered into force and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons was set up in 1997 was therefore a major step forward for humanity, after a long period of preparatory groundwork. In the almost 25 years since then, the people working at the OPCW have made an inestimable contribution to the safety of the world. That this took place in The Hague is something that fills us with immense gratitude. But vigilance is still very necessary. I sincerely hope that even in these uncertain Covid times, the OPCW and its staff will still be able to celebrate the forthcoming anniversary in an appropriate manner. Know that The Hague, international city of peace and justice - not least because of the presence of the OPCW - will always be there to support your organisation, your personnel and your important task.

J.H.C. van Zanen, LL.M.  
Mayor of The Hague