

**29 April 2006: Day of Remembrance
for All Victims of Chemical Warfare**

**Commemoration Ceremony, Held at OPCW Headquarters on
27 April 2006, to Mark the Inaugural Observance of the
Remembrance Day for All Victims of Chemical Warfare**

**STATEMENT BY H.E. MR ROGELIO PFIRTER,
DIRECTOR-GENERAL, OPCW**

Prime Minister, Mr Chairman, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, and dear friends,

This Remembrance Day for all victims of Chemical Weapons is a particularly momentous occasion.

It coincides with the date in 1997 that marked the culmination of long years of efforts on the part of the international community to craft a universal and non-discriminatory treaty that would ban, once and for all, an entire category of weapons of mass destruction.

I.

It is not by accident that we are meeting in The Hague, or that the Head of Government of our host country, the Netherlands, His Excellency Jan Peter Balkenende, is honouring us with his presence on this important occasion. The Netherlands has long promoted chemical disarmament and The Hague is of course, the legal capital of the world as well as our home. Moreover, it was in this very city 107 years ago that a group of diplomats convened to draft and conclude a seminal treaty whose objective was to put an end to the use of poisonous gases. The Hague Convention of 1899 thus represented the first step on the long and arduous path that eventually led to the entry into force of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

It is furthermore quite fitting that we should be joined at this ceremony by a Delegation of the Australian Parliament. As we all know Australia played a significant role in the efforts that culminated in the Chemical Weapons Convention

II.

In the last century chemical weapons were used both by a number of countries, and by terrorist groups. We are all too aware of the events in the spring of 1915 at Ypres, Belgium and of the very large number of victims of Chemical Weapons during the First World War. Towards the end of the XX century, Chemical Weapons were used by the Iraqi regime of the time in its war with Iran and, in 1988, against innocent civilians in Halabja, with horrifying results. Only ten years ago, on another spring morning, commuters in the Tokyo subway were suddenly confronted with a similar terror when they were attacked with sarin gas, thus initiating the era of chemical terrorism.

The signing of the Chemical Weapons Convention and the establishment of the OPCW, which now includes 178 Member States, make it clear that the international community has learned the right lessons from the dreadful experiences of the past and has chosen to completely eliminate this means of mass destruction.

III.

The aim of the Chemical Weapons Convention and of the OPCW is not only to ensure that those who possess chemical weapons destroy them safely and irreversibly, but also that those planning to misuse chemistry to produce new ones will not succeed. It is a Convention aimed at dealing both with the inheritance of the past and the needs of the future for the purpose of international peace and security.

The Chemical Weapons Convention has the support of the overwhelming majority of Member States of the United Nations, and is the only instrument that outlaws, in a verifiable and non-discriminatory way, an entire category of weapons.

The Convention now covers over ninety percent of the global population and ninety-five percent of the relevant chemical industries, whose involvement in the adoption and implementation of the Convention has been crucial to our achievements and deserves to be recognised. This crucial treaty, which we all support and implement together, grants States Parties the best possible protection against the use or threat of use of chemical weapons by others.

Yet there is no room for complacency, for there remain many challenges. The destruction of declared chemical weapons stockpiles is proceeding apace, but it is far from complete, and the Treaty needs to be fully implemented by all Member States. Similarly, there are now 178 States Parties to the Treaty but the goal of universality eludes us still. If we are to succeed in our goal of ridding the world of chemical weapons once and for all, all countries must join the Convention, including in particular all those in the Middle East as well as the in the North of the Korean Peninsula.

The nature and effect of chemical weapons make unprotected civilians their main target. The materials necessary to produce simple chemical weapons are widely available, and the technology and financial hurdles to be overcome are considerably less problematic than those posed by the illicit manufacturing and use of primitive biological or nuclear weapons. The challenge posed by chemical terrorism is ever greater.

IV.

As we remember and pay tribute to the victims of chemical weapons, we can rightly assert that chemical weapons are forever proscribed and there is no claim to legitimacy for holding or using them anywhere. Their illegality under international law is clear; and equally evident is their inhuman, vicious and immoral nature.

Observing this Remembrance Day means more than just paying due tribute to and recalling the suffering and death of the thousands of victims of chemical warfare. It also provides an opportunity to recognise effective multilateralism at work, to renew

our determination to prevent any further use of chemical weapons, and to see to it that chemistry is used exclusively for the benefit of people the world over.

In that spirit, let us also recommit ourselves to advancing international peace and security, both now and for future generations. The involvement of young artists in this ceremony serves to highlight that indispensable forward looking dimension. We have a responsibility to build a better world for our descendants;

- a genuine commitment to the goal of peace,
- an active dedication to avoiding the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction,
- and ensuring an effective ban on chemical weapons,
- are three concrete ways of contributing to such a goal.

Thank you.