

**STATEMENT BY HE AMBASSADOR VUSI BRUCE KOLOANE, SOUTH AFRICAN PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE TO THE OPCW ON BEHALF OF THE AFRICAN GROUP OF STATES TO THE CWC ON THE COMMEMORATION OF THE CENTENARY OF THE FIRST LARGE-SCALE USE OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS**

**21 APRIL 2015**

**IEPER, BELGIUM**

**Director of Ceremony,**

**Minister of Defence of Belgium,**

**Chairperson of the OPCW Conference of States Parties,**

**Director-General of the OPCW and other Senior Members of the OPCW Technical Secretariat,**

**Coordinators of the OPCW Regional Groups,**

**Their Excellencies Permanent Representatives of States Parties to the OPCW,**

**Distinguished Guests,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is a great honor for me to address this august gathering on behalf of the African Group of States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). It is of great importance to us to remember one of the horrific first events of use of chemical weapons and its injurious and deadly consequences on people during the First World War (WW1). As we solemnly remember the event of first large-scale use of chemical weapons, we offer our heartfelt support to this commemoration, we pay tribute to the victims of the war and we recognize the importance of our responsibility as States Parties to ensure a world free of chemical weapons. We commit ourselves to working hard to ensure that such atrocious attacks never target or threaten humankind again as we call for total destruction of all categories of chemical weapons.

**Excellencies,**

**Distinguished Guests,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It abhors hearing the stories of humanity witnessing the terrible consequences of use of chemical weapons. We have seen horrible pictures of those deeds where the chemical weapons' attacks injured and killed people and we have listened to disturbing and shocking stories of terror of that war. It is in this regard that we unequivocally

condemn the use and threat of use of chemical weapons and toxic chemicals as a weapon anywhere by anyone and under any circumstances as we firmly believe that no cause could ever justify it.

It is also in this context that the African Group of States Parties at the OPCW continues to reiterate its long-standing principled position on the existence of weapons of mass destruction as they pose a threat to international peace and security. We continue to call for complete destruction of all types of chemical weapons under strict and effective international control, in accordance with the Convention wherever they exist. We also support the activities of the OPCW on assistance and protection against the use and threat of use of chemical weapons and toxic chemicals. We further continue to encourage the OPCW to be ready to assist States Parties during incidents related to the use of chemical weapons and toxic chemicals.

**Excellencies,**

**Distinguished Guests,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The African Group would like to commend the organizers of this worthy event for the work they undertook to make it a success. We would like to also take this opportunity to pay tribute to fallen African soldiers who perished during World War 1. In this context, while honoring the memory of the victims of the first large-scale use of chemical weapons, it is important to recall that amongst the first victims on the front of the leper battlefield, were soldiers from Algeria.

**Excellencies,**

**Distinguished Guests,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It cannot be overemphasized that we need to work even harder to uphold the credibility and maintain the integrity of the CWC as the most effective and comprehensive multilateral treaty dealing with weapons of mass destruction today, the only treaty that bans an entire category of weapons of mass destruction and that requires the complete destruction of all categories of chemical weapons under strict verification and effective international control. The CWC has seen great achievements in ridding the world of chemical weapons, but still, while much has been accomplished in destruction of chemical weapons, a large amount of these dangerous weapons of mass destruction still remains to be destroyed. It is in this regard that we continue to be deeply disappointed that the final extended deadline of 29 April 2012 to destroy chemical weapons stockpiles was not met by the major possessor States Parties.

**Excellencies,**

**Distinguished Guests,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The OPCW was established to perform credible and effective verification of destruction of chemical weapons, perform random inspections of industrial sites to ensure that activities conducted are in accordance with the provisions of the Convention. The OPCW does this with success. To this end the support of States Parties and the constructive approach of the chemical industry have gone a long way to strengthen the Convention. International cooperation has also been pivotal to efforts to rid the world of chemical weapons, the most recent excellent example in the context of the CWC being the collective efforts of States Parties in the destruction of Syrian chemical weapons. That level of international cooperation has indicated to us the results of practical action when States Parties work together to deal with challenges. The achievements of the OPCW are also a clear indication of how States Parties can work together to promote international peace and security.

**Excellencies,**

**Distinguished Guests,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The African Group of States Parties to the Convention therefore reaffirms its unwavering support to efforts to encourage the remaining States not Party to the Convention to accede to it without further delay. We also support the initiative of a Middle East region becoming a zone free of all weapons of mass destruction.

**Excellencies,**

**Distinguished Guests,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

In conclusion, today, in remembering the victims of chemical attacks carried out in leper many years ago, let us rededicate ourselves as this collective of international community to total destruction of all types of chemical weapons to ensure that no further victim suffers as a result of horrible consequences of chemical weapons and toxic chemicals. A day like this is worthy of our reaffirmation, strong commitment and dedication to the goals and objectives of the Convention. As we renew our determination to ensure that the Convention is universally acceptable and effectively enforced, let us not forget the predicament of those victims who suffered inconceivable anguish from the use of chemical weapons and toxic chemicals as that should continue to be a cautious reminder and to inform our future actions.

I thank you for your attention