

Excellences,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Eastern European Group of the OPCW.

We have gathered here today, united for a common cause, to commemorate and honour those who fought and died in Ieper chemical attack a century ago. In their memory — and in memory of all those who have given their lives serving their nations — we must strive to do better, to work harder, to make this a more just and fairer world in which such atrocities can never happen.

On the 22nd of April 1915 at Ieper, mankind experienced the first mass use of poison gas on the Western Front. This event gave rise to a new kind of war – chemical warfare. The use of poisonous chlorine caused death to many people, lost of eyesight or serious damage to the lungs.

Eastern Front saw no fewer chemical weapon attacks – probably more - than did the Western Front during World War I.

The first large-scale use of chlorine gas at the Eastern front of the World War One was on the 31st of May 1915, about a month after tragic events in Ieper in the Battle over Rawka near the town of Bolimów (about 50 km West of Warsaw). The gas was released from 12 000 cylinders that covered about 12 kilometer long frontline. It is impossible to estimate the number of fallen soldiers caused by numerous gas attacks at the Eastern front. The chlorine attack in Bolimów on the 31st of May 1915 took at least 11 000 lives.

The Cold War saw chemical weapons arsenals soar to unthinkable levels, and brought into play all forms of military technology. Scientific research establishments on both sides of the Iron Curtain were pressed into service, researching defenses and new forms of weaponry. Frightening deadly agents and strains were developed.

The chemical Cold War also brought forth some of the most horrific weapons imaginable. No doubt, Chemical Warfare was a huge danger during the Cold War.

Fortunately, the end of the Cold War enabled the former adversaries to agree to ban all chemical weapons. States were adamant to make chemical weapons a thing of the past – by deeds, not just words. And, after almost two decades of difficult negotiations, they succeeded.

Their efforts gave birth to the Chemical Weapons Convention, and to an entirely independent organisation, OPCW, to oversee its implementation.

Today, the Convention stands out as a unique international legal instrument relating to weapons of mass destruction. It is a comprehensive regime geared towards

riding the world of chemical weapons, and making sure they never again threaten humankind.

The overwhelming majority of countries became States Parties to the CWC providing for the necessary political will. We are proud that all countries in the Eastern Europe region are parties to the CWC. We are firmly committed to all the objectives of the Convention and are fully contributing to its implementation.

Working to realize these objectives, the OPCW relies on the expertise, professionalism and dedication of its staff – qualities that have been forged through a solid record of achievement. However, this would not have been possible without the steadfast support and commitment of all the States Parties.

The fruitful results move us ever closer to the vision of a world free from an entire category of weapons of mass destruction. This is one of the most tangible contributions to the goals of the United Nations defined in terms of promoting international peace and security through disarmament.

As States Parties of the Eastern European Group we reaffirm our commitment to a future in which chemical weapons will be irrevocably consigned to history.