



ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

Day of Remembrance for All Victims of Chemical Warfare

Statement by the Director-General of the OPCW

26 November 2018

The Hague

REMARKS AS DELIVERED

Chairperson of the Conference of the States Parties,
Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands,
Mayor of The Hague,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is with great solemnity that I welcome you all to this ceremony marking the Day of Remembrance for All Victims of Chemical Weapons.

Whenever we gather for this occasion, it is a poignant time that strikes a deep chord within us. This year, however, carries more than the usual weight. Our commemoration coincides with the centenary of the end of the Great War.

A little over two weeks ago I stood under the vaulted ceiling of Menin Gate in Ieper for the anniversary of Armistice Day. As we all linked hands in silence during the playing of the last post, it was a moment for reflection.

At the close of that war, more than 90,000 soldiers had died from the terrible effects of chemical weapons. A million were left sickened, disfigured, or permanently disabled. Countless millions more were psychologically traumatised by their experiences of gas warfare. Since then, chemical weapons have continued to be used in conflicts and have continued to cause casualties.

The chamber in which we have assembled bears the name of Ieper, the site of the first large scale chemical attack. It carries this name so that we may never forget the significance of the Great War in our undertaking to rid the world of chemical weapons.

That endeavour has borne us tremendous success. The OPCW has assisted and verified the destruction of over 96% of the declared chemical arsenals of its members. 193 countries have committed to realising the ultimate goal of a world free of chemical weapons. Many of those countries are represented here in The Hague this week for the five-yearly Review Conference.

While commemorating the past, this is a moment for us to look to the future. It will allow us to set the course of the OPCW and to determine its priorities for implementing the Chemical Weapons Convention. It is also an important chance for the States Parties to renew their unequivocal support for that Convention, which has wrought so many benefits for humanity.

Victim associations, some of whom are with us today, have an important role to play in these discussions. Their presence serves as a reminder that the barbarity of chemical weapons is still imprinted on the minds of living people who have experienced their use.

We must continue to demonstrate our commitment and to support them. It is for this reason that the OPCW established the trust fund for the International Support Network for Victims of Chemical Weapons. For the past seven years, we have been meeting some of the needs of those whose suffering is ongoing.

Today, as we take this moment to remember the victims of the past and those of the present, let us reaffirm our resolve to ensure there are none in the future.

I thank you for your kind attention.
