



Kingdom of the Netherlands

Day of Remembrance for all Victims of Chemical Warfare

Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons

The Hague, 1 December 2020

Statement by Mr Paul Huijts, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
of the Kingdom of the Netherlands

Regrettably this year an in-person observance in memory of all victims of chemical weapons will not be possible. Nevertheless, it is my great honour, as representative of the Netherlands, proud host country to the OPCW, to address you on this solemn occasion by means of a written statement.

Over 100 years ago the world was confronted for the first time with the large scale use of chemical weapons. The unspeakable carnage and human suffering that resulted made the global community realise that the use of chemical weapons was utterly unacceptable and should be banned forever.

To date 193 countries have ratified the Chemical Weapons Convention, rendering it a nearly universal, comprehensive treaty that has been the basis for the elimination of all stockpiles declared by possessor states. This goal has been nearly achieved.

However, this is not a reason for the States Parties to be complacent. Even though we may be approaching the total eradication of this category of weapons of mass destruction, in recent years the world has seen a resurgence of the use of chemical weapons. People are still suffering from the effects of their deliberate use.

In its first report, the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team confirmed three instances of the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime against its own population. Earlier the Joint Investigative Mechanism also confirmed several cases of chemical weapons use in Syria.

The world was also shocked by the repeated use of chemical weapons in other countries, including Malaysia, the United Kingdom and most recently in the Russian Federation, where Alexei Navalny was poisoned with a chemical of the Novichok class.

The Netherlands is deeply concerned about the renewed use of chemical weapons. Of even greater concern perhaps, is the hesitant and acquiescing response of the international community to these abhorrent acts, which clearly violate international law. These crimes cannot go unpunished and the perpetrators must be brought to justice. To achieve this goal, we, the States Parties to the CWC, have a duty to fulfil. We must work together with determination to support the goals of the CWC and all aspects of the OPCW's work. That is the only way to end the use of chemical weapons once and for all. And there is no better way to honour the victims.