



The Hague

Mayor

Statement on the occasion of the Day of Remembrance for All Victims of Chemical Warfare

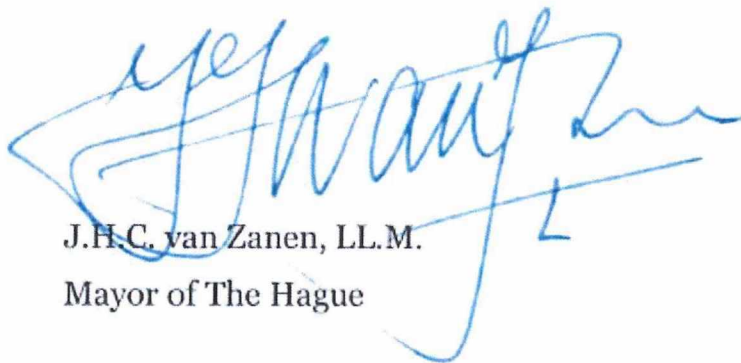
“What we saw, was total death. Nothing was alive. The French trenches were empty, but the following half mile lay strewn with the bodies of the suffocated French soldiers. It was unbelievable.”

This was the eye-witness account of a German soldier who was there on that day, Thursday 22 April 1915, somewhere on the front line between Steenstrate and Langemark, just above Ypres. A day that has gone down in history as the day on which large-scale chemical warfare began.

Much more recent is the attack on Halabja, where more than 5,000 people died and another 10,000 or more were injured. Innocent men, women and children. The attack on Halabja, the most deadly gas attack since 1945, was one of the worst of its kind in recent history. One of the main suppliers of the deadly chemicals that were to be used at Halabja was ultimately convicted here in The Hague of aiding and abetting war crimes. A monument commemorating the victims at Halabja was created, thanks to a civil society initiative. It stands next to the headquarters of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) which, since 1997, has been responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Thanks to the OPCW and all the people who work there or have worked there, our world has indeed become a little bit safer. We are very proud of the fact that the OPCW does that work from here in our city.

The threat posed by chemical weapons, however, has not yet been eliminated. It remains absolutely necessary to contain that danger wherever possible. To protect both the present and future inhabitants of our planet. And out of respect for all the victims of chemical weapons over the past 107 years. The Hague will therefore always continue to strive for a world without chemical weapons.



J.H.C. van Zanen, LL.M.

Mayor of The Hague