



The Hague

Mayor

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

"I thought I was accustomed to war and all its frightfulness, yet this fairly staggers me [...] I saw hundreds dying all round me [...] There they lay, scores of them (we lost 800, nearly all from gas) in the bottom of the trench, in every conceivable posture of human agony; the clothes torn off their bodies in a vain effort to breathe." Fragments from the letter home of a serviceman who managed to survive the gas attack near the village of Hulluch in northern France. Where, from 27-29 April 1916, the German forces attacked the enemy, in this case mainly Irish regiments, with chlorine gas. The 29th was particularly devastating because on that day the clouds of gas drifted slowly and settled over the frontline trenches.

Even more than a century later, a period in which so many atrocities have taken place, it is chilling to try to imagine scenes such as this. The veterans of the First World War, many of whom struggled with serious health problems as a result of gas attacks, are no longer with us. But there are still people living in and around Halabja that was also attacked with chemical weapons in 1988, resulting in more than 5,000 fatalities, who are reminded every day of that terrible war crime. The chlorine gas attack on the Syrian village of Saraqib in 2018 documented by the OPCW is even more recent.

The OPCW is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year. The Hague considers it a great honour that this unique organisation is based here. The world is that bit safer, thanks to the OPCW. I therefore have the greatest respect for the men and women who have contributed to that and those who continue to do so. Because it is not without its risks. The OPCW was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for its work in 2013, and rightly so. The threat posed by chemical weapons is as great as ever and remains undiminished. The global community must therefore do everything it can to contain that threat, most especially in these times of worrying geopolitical developments. The OPCW can therefore always count on our unwavering support.



Jan van Zanen
Mayor of The Hague