



Day of Remembrance for all victims of chemical warfare

Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons

The Hague, 20 November 2023

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

On this Day of Remembrance for all victims of chemical warfare, I feel honoured to have been given this opportunity to reflect with you and to pay our respects to the victims.

We can confidently say that 2023 was a very successful year for the OPCW. For one thing, King Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands officially opened the new Centre for Chemistry and Technology, or ChemTech Centre for short, on 12 May. And on 7 July the OPCW confirmed that all declared chemical weapons stockpiles of the United States had been irreversibly destroyed.

These two landmark moments in the history of the OPCW underline the remarkable status of the Chemical Weapons Convention as the most successful multilateral disarmament treaty ever.

The ChemTech Centre was made possible thanks to voluntary contributions from many member states. It will enable the OPCW to continue to play its world-leading role in ensuring that the global norm against the use of chemical weapons is upheld, and in promoting the peaceful use of chemistry in developed and developing countries.

The irreversible destruction of the last of the United States' chemical munitions earlier this year was an important milestone for the OPCW. Indeed, it was a historic success for multilateralism in the field of disarmament, as Director-General Fernando Arias stated when he announced the news. OPCW member states should consider the huge significance of this development, since it confirms our collective determination and commitment to completely eradicate chemical weapons so that they will never be used again.

Even so, we still face other challenges. Four countries remain outside the OPCW, and thus outside of its monitoring procedures. What's more, none of those responsible for the use of chemical weapons in recent years, have been held accountable in a court of law. In addition, scientific developments have accelerated over the past years. And while these developments have been mainly applied for the benefit of humankind, there is

also an increasing risk that new and extremely toxic chemicals will emerge. The international community must therefore remain vigilant and cooperate closely on countering threats like this. At the same time, all countries should be able to benefit from chemistry's peaceful applications.

The OPCW has clearly achieved outstanding successes both this year and in previous years. But its work is not finished, and it will not be finished for many years to come. It is our joint responsibility to give our unwavering support to the OPCW and its Technical Secretariat. That is our solemn obligation, not only to the victims of chemical warfare whom we remember today, but also to ourselves, and to our children: to ensure that these inhumane weapons will never be used again.