



The Hague

Mayor

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

"Seventeen days of Hades!" That is how John McCrae, military doctor and poet, described his time at the front during the Second Battle of Ypres. On Thursday 22 April 1915, he witnessed at close range the beginning of modern chemical warfare. McCrae: "At the end of the first day if anyone had told us we had to spend seventeen days there, we would have folded our hands and said it could not be done."

John McCrae and his medical staff had to treat thousands of victims of the chlorine gas attacks in their field hospital. Ultimately, over the course of the so-called 'War to end all wars', an estimated more than one million soldiers would fall victim to chemical agents. Over one hundred thousand of them did not survive.

In light of the misery that chemical weapons caused during the First World War, it is particularly bitter to realize that serious talks about prohibiting them had taken place as early as sixteen years before. Already in 1899, during the First Peace Conference, a declaration had been adopted that included a ban on the use of projectiles designed to spread choking or harmful gases.

The Hague considers it a great honour to be the seat of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. The OPCW's presence is one of the reasons why we may call ourselves the international city of peace and justice. Through the efforts of the OPCW, the world has become a much safer place. That is why I have deep respect for the women and men who have contributed to this work, or who continue to do so. For this work is not without risks. The OPCW has quite rightly been honoured with the Nobel Peace Prize. However, the danger posed by chemical weapons remains as great as ever. We must therefore do everything in our power to contain that danger. This is a responsibility we carry not only to ourselves and to the generations who will inhabit this planet after us. We also owe it to every victim these weapons have claimed since that fateful Thursday, 22 April 1915.

That is why The Hague will continue to strive for a world free of chemical weapons.

Jan van Zanen

Mayor of The Hague