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NOTE BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL

ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION TO THE STATE DUMA

The Director-General circulates, for the information of delegations, a copy of a letter which he received on 29 October from the Ambassador of the Russian Federation to the Netherlands. The letter contains a copy of the address of the President of the Russian Federation to the State Duma on the issue of ratification of the Chemical Weapons Convention, which was circulated in the Duma on 29 October 1997.

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THE PRESIDENT OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION
ADDRESS
TO THE STATE DUMA CONCERNING THE RATIFICATION
OF THE CONVENTION ON THE PROHIBITION
AND DESTRUCTION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

Honourable Deputies,

I have to address you on a matter which affects not only the political authority of Russia, but above all, the safety and health of Russians, and their children and grandchildren, who live in the areas where accumulated stockpiles of chemical weapons are stored and are going to be destroyed.

The international community has concluded that the destruction of stockpiles of chemical weapons must take place according to uniform rules and under strict international control. This was why the Convention on the Prohibition and Destruction of Chemical Weapons was signed in 1993.

Russia also signed this document.

In April 1997, the Convention came into force. One hundred countries have already become parties to it, including four of the five Permanent Members of the United Nations Security Council.

In March of this year I presented the Convention for ratification. In October, Honourable Deputies, you intend to make your decision on this question. The State Duma has expressed its commitment to the aims of the Convention and has adopted a Federal Law on the destruction of chemical weapons, which gives me some cause for optimism. I think the next step, logically, is ratification of the Convention.

Russia's adherence to this Convention will not in any way undermine the fighting capability of our Armed Forces. As a method of armed warfare, chemical weapons have already been barred from our military vocabulary. Russia has other, much more powerful and effective means of deterring aggression. This is why the production of chemical weapons has ceased and will not be resumed. At the same time the continued storage and maintenance of stockpiles of chemical weapons creates serious problems for Russia of an economic and environmental kind, and in terms of military policy, and endangers its security and prestige among the international community.

I am firmly convinced that speedy ratification of the Convention is in Russia's fundamental interest.

The destruction of tens of thousands of tons of decaying lethal poison removes the danger of an environmental disaster. Spending vast sums on storing and maintaining a “delayed-action chemical bomb” - when there is a grave shortage of budget funds - is both irresponsible and immoral.

Our destruction techniques for chemical weapons are acknowledged by international experts to be sufficiently safe, superior to others in the world. I guarantee that during the building and operation of destruction facilities for chemical weapons the highest priority will be accorded to public safety and health.

I have given instructions to the Government to allocate the necessary financial resources in 1998 to chemical disarmament. I shall insist that it continually monitors the financing of programmes for the destruction of stockpiles of chemical weapons and the conversion of former production facilities. The State Duma will be fully and regularly informed of the ongoing situation in this regard.

Adherence to the Convention will bring about further necessary preconditions for developing our cooperation and trade with the outside world and for obtaining international assistance in destroying chemical weapons. This assistance must comprise at least twenty percent of total spending for these purposes.

Even without ratifying the Convention Russia will be compelled to destroy chemical weapons. But in that case it will have to do it alone, relying on its own efforts and under stringent economic sanctions imposed by the international community. Our losses in that case would far exceed the expenditure and the payments made by Russia as a party to the Convention.

If our country renounces chemical weapons and destroys them, with our participation the Convention will become the main guarantee for us that chemical weapons from foreign sources will not be stockpiled along our borders.

We will be able to insist that the few countries which have not yet renounced chemical weapons do so without delay.

The Convention will also become an effective means of combating international “chemical” terrorism.

At the same time, I assure Russians that our country will have all the necessary means and resources at its disposal to protect its Armed Forces and its population from the possible use of chemical weapons by anyone. The Armed Forces will strike a crushing blow against any aggressor who takes it into his head to use them against us.

Not all the provisions of the Convention are exactly what we want. However, we will be able to influence how, in practice, various articles of the Convention, such as the timetable for the destruction of chemical weapons, apply to Russia. For this purpose we have to be among the participants in the Convention, not outside.

I believe that in October the State Duma will make the right decision and ratify the Convention on the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

Signed

B. Yeltsin

24 October 1997

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