



ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION
OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

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STATEMENT BY

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DEPUTY DIRECTOR-GENERAL

ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS
(OPCW)

AT THE

COMMEMORATION OF THE 94th ANNIVERSARY OF
THE END OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

CITY OF IEPER, BELGIUM
SUNDAY, 11 NOVEMBER 2012

Honourable Mayor Dehaene,
His Excellency Mr Kris Peeters, Minister-
President of the Government of Flanders,
His Excellency Dr Brendan Nelson,
Ambassador of Australia to Belgium,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. Each year on 11 November we come together to commemorate a terrible tragedy in our history and pay our homage to millions of lives - those of soldiers and civilians alike - lost in a grim and ruthless war. World War I counts among the deadliest conflicts in history. It brought death and suffering on a massive scale, with chemical weapons alone accounting for more than a million casualties. It was on the battlefield of Ieper that chemical agents were first used as a weapon of mass destruction.

2. This tragic legacy of World War I remains deeply engraved in our collective memory. The presence of H.E. Mr Kris Peeters, Minister-President of the Government of Flanders, and H.E. Dr Brendan Nelson, Ambassador of Australia to Belgium, testify to the significance of this annual commemoration. I would also like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation to Mayor Dehaene and his team whose continued commitment to mark this important occasion which renews our resolve and commitment to completely eliminate all categories of weapons of mass destruction.

3. The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) attaches great importance to this annual commemoration. The tragic experience of the battlefield of Ieper led to efforts by the international community to establish a wider legal prohibition of chemical weapons in the aftermath of World War I. The Geneva Protocol that was concluded in 1925 banned the first use of both chemical and biological weapons. Although the Geneva Protocol did not prohibit the production and stockpiling of chemical weapons, it was an important step towards eventually achieving a total ban of these cruel weapons.

4. In 1997, following more than a decade of negotiations, the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) entered into force. The Treaty was the successful result of the international community's long-standing efforts to comprehensively ban an entire category of weapons of mass destruction. This unique Convention establishes a complete, comprehensive and legally-binding ban on chemical weapons. It creates a comprehensive international verification regime to ensure the destruction of declared chemical weapons stockpiles. As a multi-faceted tool, the Convention's objectives include complete disarmament; non-proliferation and preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons; providing assistance and protection to States Parties against chemical weapons; and promoting the peaceful uses of chemistry through international cooperation.

5. Earlier this year, the OPCW celebrated fifteen years of implementation of the Convention. During this relatively short time-span, considerable progress has been achieved in key areas of the Treaty's implementation:

6. 188 States Parties have joined the Convention to date, representing the overwhelming majority of nations around the world and one of the fastest rates ever of accession to a disarmament treaty. It is impressive that the norms enshrined in the CWC enjoy such broad international acceptance and recognition. We are actively encouraging those eight non-States of the CWC to join the international community on this noble mission through accede to the Convention.

7. The destruction of chemical weapons is a core objective of the Convention. Approximately 75% of the existing chemical weapons stockpiles have been verifiably destroyed. The near elimination of these large stockpiles is no small achievement in international disarmament and non-proliferation. The possessor States have committed to completing the destruction of the remaining weapons under conditions of enhanced transparency.

8. All our Member States allow their chemical industry to be verified to ensure that chemicals are produced and used for peaceful purposes only. So far more than 2200 industry facilities in more than 81 countries have been inspected. These activities are an important safeguard to verify compliance with the provisions of the Treaty and to prevent the re-emergence of chemical weapons.

9. The OPCW is facing a rapidly changing international environment, along with new challenges and threats. One of the major tasks ahead of us is to ensure that the Chemical Weapons Convention remains a relevant and effective barrier against chemical weapons in the future.

10. We have learned from the grave tragedies of the 20th century. It is because of this legacy that leper has not only become a place for reflection of the terrible human suffering but also, most importantly, for hope and resolve – the hope for a more secure and peaceful world in which chemical weapons are completely eliminated and the resolve to work together, tirelessly, towards the realisation of this noble goal.
