



**STATEMENT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL
AT THE
REMEMBRANCE DAY FOR ALL VICTIMS OF CHEMICAL WARFARE
29 APRIL 2013**

Mr Chairman,
Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,

I wish to welcome you all to this solemn ceremony to pay homage to the memory of all victims of chemical weapons.

I am grateful to you, Ambassador Peter Goosen for presiding over this commemoration in your capacity as Chairman of the Conference of the States Parties.

It is an honour for me to welcome in our midst Mr Karel van Oosterom, Director-General of Political Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and Mr Jozias van Aartsen, Mayor of The Hague. Your presence underlines the close cooperation the OPCW enjoys with both the Municipality of The Hague and the Dutch government and their consistent support for the Organisation.

I also wish to thank the distinguished Representatives and delegates of the States Parties, representatives of international organisations based in The Hague, Dutch institutions and government as well as the civil society for their participation.

There is no better occasion than this to recall and reaffirm our collective commitment to a world free of chemical weapons. Remembrance Day offers a moment of reflection and an opportunity for renewal.

We cannot and must not allow the pain and suffering inflicted by chemical weapons to recede into the backwaters of collective memory.

And there is no better tribute to those tragic victims than our actions – actions that sustain the promise the Convention holds; that of saving humanity from the scourge of chemical weapons and of striving together to make our world forever free of chemical weapons.

States Parties had the opportunity to act recently; and they rose to the occasion.

Just over a week ago, they demonstrated why the OPCW is reputed as an exemplary inter-governmental body.

That the Conference closed just a minute before midnight on its last scheduled day may not have been a coincidence.

A new menace of chemical weapons made us think long and hard. But consensus once again triumphed at the OPCW. The Conference reiterated a deep concern that chemical weapons may have been used in Syria and condemned any such use by anyone.

The results of the Third Review Conference are before everyone. A strong reaffirmation to the goals of the Convention is followed by recommendations to translate the political will into concrete actions.

The opening of the Conference by Mr Ban Ki-moon; the first ever by a Secretary-General shows how far the Organisation has come in commanding international recognition and respect.

The Conference reviewed and pronounced itself on every aspect of the Convention. It has provided clear guidance when this was crucially needed. This is true for all the core programme areas of the Convention.

The spirit of the all important decisions on destruction of chemical weapons has been preserved while improving verification in general has been properly recognised as vital to preventing the re-emergence of chemical weapons. Taking due account of scientific and technological developments as these might impact the Convention has also found strong support.

The Review Conference was held at a time when the Organisation has reached a crossroads and must adapt itself to new conditions and new challenges. 80 per cent of declared chemical weapons no longer exist and our vision must now focus on eliminating the rest while preparing the Organisation as a versatile entity that secures the future permanently against the threat of re-emergence of chemical weapons.

States Parties deserve full credit for breaking new ground in order to make our work responsive to contemporary and future needs.

Over the course of the operation of this successful regime, the OPCW has become a repository of knowledge, skills, and good practices in disarmament and an important part of the global management of security. Our engagement with States Parties, experts, the chemical industry, and other stakeholders, and our work in implementing the various provisions of the Convention, has led to the development of considerable expertise and experience.

When institutions generate such wealth of experience and well-honed good practices, it is not only possible to engage in knowledge transfer and global education, it, in fact, becomes a responsibility. It is our responsibility, in the spirit of the Convention, to share our knowledge and to educate, for the progress and advancement of the international community and people around the world.

The clearest example of the forward looking approach of the Third Review Conference is the recognition in its Political Declaration of the Organisation as a repository of knowledge and expertise; asking the Director-General to present proposals for its preservation and propagation.

In the same manner, the Conference has prioritised the promotion of outreach, capacity building, education and public diplomacy recognising also the role of relevant sectors of the academia and civil society in this endeavour.

I have mentioned just a few of the highlights from the report of the Third Review Conference. My purpose is simply to commend the vision, foresight and commitment of our States Parties.

Such a commitment has brought us closer to our goals. It has also made the Convention an effective instrument that not only promotes security but also upholds human dignity.

The cause that we espouse transcends national boundaries. It is a mission that binds us together. It is a profound responsibility.

We must speak in one voice in condemning any use or threat of use of chemical weapons and pressing those governments that have not yet subscribed to the Convention to do so at the earliest.

There is simply no place for chemical weapons in our world, and we must redouble our efforts in securing the universal acceptance of the Convention.

The moral and legal authority of the Convention continues to gain strength. We must now resolve to make the Convention a permanent barrier against chemical weapons in every part of the world.

We have a plan and must now get down to implementing it.

This will be the best tribute to the memory of victims of chemical warfare. Let us rededicate ourselves to the important mission before us.

Progress will bring closer the vision underlying the Convention. Ensuring a chemical weapons free world will not reverse the suffering inflicted by chemical weapons in the past. But it is the only way we will

raise ourselves in our humanity and to pay respectful homage to those who suffered an unspeakable atrocity.

I thank you for your attention.