



ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION
OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

**STATEMENT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL
AT
REMEMBRANCE DAY FOR ALL VICTIMS OF CHEMICAL WARFARE
26 APRIL 2012**

Mr Chairman,
Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,

I welcome you all to this solemn observance in memory of all victims of chemical weapons.

I thank Ambassador Paul Arkwright, for presiding over this commemoration in his capacity as Chairman of the Conference of the States Parties.

I am grateful to all of you for your participation in this solemn commemoration. I especially recognise the presence of Mr Ed Kronenburg, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and Mr Jozias van Aartsen, the Mayor of The Hague. Their participation confirms the close cooperation and goodwill between the OPCW and our host institutions.

This gathering brings together distinguished Representatives and delegates of State Parties, high representatives of international organisations based in The Hague, Dutch institutions and government as well as the civil society. Their presence confirms the importance of this event as both a moment of reflection and an expression of hope.

The Chemical Weapons Convention completes 15 years of its operation. This represents 15 years of progress that has no precedent in disarmament. The Convention embodies a commitment that took a hundred years to codify. An unqualified and unconditional ban on chemical weapons was the only means to prevent the carnage that humanity witnessed time and again. Countless victims of chemical weapons perished in the most painful circumstances. Those surviving a chemical attack continued to suffer from lifelong ailments. By the frequency of their use, chemical weapons proved to be the most cruel agents of death and destruction.

The Convention promised a new era free from the scourge of chemical weapons. The work of the OPCW over the last 15 years has brought that vision closer at hand. Starting as a promise, we have collectively made the CWC a worthy testament of our collective resolve and spirit of international cooperation. It is an endeavour for the sake of humanity. It is an enterprise in the service of peace. And it is the best tribute we can offer to all victims of chemical weapons.

The CWC set out to eliminate completely chemical weapons from the world and to prevent their re-emergence in any form. Today nearly three quarters of all declared chemical weapons stand destroyed under OPCW verification. And although not all chemical weapons will be destroyed by the final extended deadline, States Parties have dealt with this issue with characteristic wisdom and sagacity. Their decision to enable the major possessor States to complete the task within a reasonable period of time confirms the reputation of the OPCW as a cooperative and purposeful multilateral body. Our members have remained focussed on the mission and what is best to accomplish it.

OPCW inspections of the global chemical industry promote confidence in compliance. Such inspections have now been conducted at nearly 2200 facilities. The support of States Parties and the constructive approach of the chemical industry strengthen the Convention. This cooperation sets an example of how respect for international treaties can be demonstrated not merely as declaratory policy but through practical action.

Our assistance and protection procedures and international cooperation programs are widely welcomed as tangible benefits of joining the Convention.

The moral and legal authority of the Convention continues to gain strength with every new addition to our Membership that has grown at a pace unprecedented in disarmament history.

The Convention has contributed to the advancement of treaty and customary law. As a multifaceted legal tool, it serves to strengthen both international humanitarian law as well as the global disarmament and non-proliferation objectives.

The robust institution – the OPCW - emerging from the commitment and the cooperation of States Parties has the capacity to adapt to the numerous future challenges. But there is no room for complacency.

We must remain steadfast in our efforts to convince the 8 remaining States to join the Convention at the earliest. The initiative to make the region of the Middle East, a zone free from all weapons of mass destruction needs to be fully

supported. On its part, the OPCW will make its contribution to this process as it is consistent with the objective of promoting the universality of the Convention. Effective domestic implementation of the Convention should also remain a priority so as to make the Convention an effective tool to deter those who may chose to violate its prohibitions for criminal or terrorist purposes.

The prohibitions and proscriptions of the Convention will also be tested in an environment of continual advancements in science and technology. We will need to remain vigilant and ready to reinforce the CWC which will become progressively necessary. After all, the purpose is never under any circumstances to allow exceptions to the general ban on chemical weapons.

The achievements of the OPCW represent an example of how the UN Charter's principles for the promotion of international peace and security can be translated into concrete action.

Today, while remembering the victims of chemical warfare, let us rededicate ourselves to the mission before us which is not just the complete eradication of chemical weapons stockpiles but also making sure that there is never again another victim to suffer the terrible consequences of chemical weapons.

A reaffirmation on this day of a strong commitment to the goals and objectives of the Convention is thus a worthy act of remembrance.

The plight of those victims who suffered unimaginable grief from the use of chemical weapons impelled international action to bring such atrocities to a permanent end. That responsibility now devolves on the States Parties to the CWC. They have through concerted action demonstrated consistently that they are equal to the task. I am sure as we renew our determination to make the application of the Convention universally acceptable and effectively enforced, they will once again rise to the occasion to collectively carry the beacon of hope that the CWC has come to symbolise.

I thank you for your attention.