

Unveiling of Halabja Monument

Remarks by Director-General OPCW

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On 16 March 1988, thousands of peaceful residents among them, many women and children perished in Halabja as a result of a barbarous chemical weapons attack.

I have always taken this tragedy personally to heart, since becoming Director-General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons in July 2010. I have delivered messages at every anniversary to honour the memory of the victims, and to warn against complacency in our collective efforts to rid the world of chemical weapons.

I have highlighted the tragedy of Halabja in many speeches – including before a worldwide audience at the Nobel Peace Prize award ceremony in Oslo last December.

I have also met with survivors of chemical weapon attacks on numerous occasions.

I am especially pleased that today, in the wake of the twenty-sixth anniversary of the Halabja massacre, we are unveiling a monument to the victims here on the grounds of the OPCW.

This monument stands, as a permanent reminder of inhumane suffering, of irreparable loss, and of the perseverance of survivors of chemical attacks to live out their lives as fully as possible.

And as a reminder to all humankind of the stories these survivors have lived to tell.

Stories whose immense tragedy makes clear why the name of Halabja has become synonymous with the indiscriminate cruelty of chemical weapons.

On behalf of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, I wish to convey to all the residents of Halabja – especially families of the victims – our deepest sympathies for your loss.

At the same time, I speak to people around the world.

For in remembering Halabja's victims, we remember all victims of chemical weapons throughout the past century.

This is a lesson that we have been learning for a hundred years now – from the battlefields of Flanders, to the suburbs of Damascus.

A lesson that is still worth to recall, as we move swiftly towards achieving a world free of chemical weapons.

It is through our common commitment to building a future that does not forget the past that we can best protect against tragedies like Halabja ever occurring again.