

Remarks on the Remembrance Armistice Day
Ambassador Hamid Ali Rao, OPCW Deputy Director-General
Wednesday, 11 November 2015
Ieper, Belgium

Honourable Mayor,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, I thank the City of Ieper, for gathering us here today to commemorate the Armistice Day.

The First World War cast a long shadow over our humanity.

It bequeathed to us a long road to recovery from unprecedented devastation, as well as the memory of countless victims.

It also bequeathed to us a responsibility to ensure that such suffering never again comes to pass.

Armistice Day is, foremost, a day of remembrance – a permanent memorial in our collective conscience to the millions who fell in World War I.

But it is also a call to action.

Action to maintain our vigilance against the threat of war.

And action to prevent recourse to weapons that pose a threat to our humanity.

The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, or OPCW, has an especially important stake in the collective memory of Ieper.

For it was in fields not far from here that chemical weapons were used for the first time on a large scale in April 1915, one hundred years ago.

By war's end, chemical weapons had claimed more than 90,000 lives and more than a million casualties.

In the wake of this great tragedy, a concerted effort was made to turn the horrific legacy of chemical warfare into an enduring hope of disarmament.

This effort was eventually crowned with success in the form of a global ban on the production, stockpiling and use of these barbarous weapons.

Today, eighteen years since the Chemical Weapons Convention entered into force, 192 States have joined this cause, which covers 98% of the global population.

The OPCW has overseen the destruction of over 90% of all declared chemical weapons, and it is expected that within the next eight years complete elimination of this category of weapon of mass destruction will be achieved.

I think this is a remarkable achievement that is a fitting monument to the memory of all who perished at the hands of these inhumane and indiscriminate weapons across the globe.

It is also an achievement that we must safeguard into the future by ensuring chemical weapons remain forever consigned to the past.

In April this year, the States Parties of the OPCW gathered in Ieper to commemorate the centenary of the advent of chemical weapons, and we all re-dedicated ourselves to upholding the global ban against these weapons in the Ieper Declaration.

This historic declaration serves as a testament to the international community's resolve that chemistry never again be used to harm humankind.

This resolve must serve as our benchmark to ensure future generations never come to experience the horror and suffering that these weapons cause.

And this must be the expectation of all of us who gather here to honour sacrifices made at such enormous cost.

For our act of remembrance is all the more worthy when we remember the past to build a future free of chemical weapons.

This is a future in which the weapons that can destroy us have been destroyed.

And we are thus able to lay solid foundations for a safer, more peaceful world.

Thank you for your attention.