



ORGANISATION FOR THE PROHIBITION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS

Day of Remembrance for All Victims of Chemical Warfare Statement by the Director-General

30 November 2017

REMARKS AS DELIVERED

Mr Chairperson, Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates, Ladies and gentlemen,

I wish to express my gratitude to you all for attending this ceremony to mark the Day of Remembrance for Victims of Chemical Warfare. Each year we gather to pay homage to the memory of those who became victims of chemical weapons. Their tragedy lends earnestness to our work to eliminate this scourge forever.

2017 marks the Twentieth Anniversary of the entry into force of the Chemical Weapons Convention and the founding of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. Remembrance has been an essential element in our commemoration of two decades of progress under the CWC. It was the haunting images of the terrible suffering of victims that motivated in no small measure the efforts to comprehensively ban a weapon regarded repugnant by all people of compassion and goodwill. It is that shared sense of decency and common humanity that drives us to fulfil the object and purpose of the Convention to exclude completely the possibility of the use of chemical weapons.

The suffering of the victims underscores the importance of keeping the international norm against the use of chemical weapons strong and abiding. This is a weapon that is indiscriminate in its effect and inhumane in its nature. It is incumbent upon us to redouble our efforts to realise the vision of the Convention and to show zero tolerance for any use of chemical weapons anywhere. The OPCW has established in 2011 a trust fund for International Support Network for Victims of Chemical Weapons. Several projects have been realised in this context and others are being considered in consultation with States Parties.

Over the past seven years I have met survivors on different occasions, both here in The Hague and abroad. I visited them in hospitals where they were treated. Some of them are present here today. I commend these courageous people for their tireless work in raising awareness of their plight and the deplorable nature of chemical warfare. Honouring the victims and their families requires an unequivocal condemnation of any use of chemical weapons and holding the perpetrators to account and for justice to take its course. This is also important to deter those who may show disdain for legal norms and fundamental ethical values.

I am pleased to observe that the States Parties to the CWC have unanimously condemned the use of chemical weapons anywhere under any circumstances. They took a principled and firm position in Ieper, in 2015 when they issued a solemn declaration. This position has been reiterated during the Conference of the States Parties which I welcome. 192 countries have pledged to rid the world of this category of weapon of mass destruction and the Secretariat has developed the capabilities and expertise to achieve this goal. Our gains in the quest to completely eliminate chemical weapons from the world are unprecedented historical milestones.

Nearly all of the vast quantities of declared chemical weapons have been verifiably destroyed. This year alone accounts for a number of attainments. The Russian Federation completed its demilitarisation process and Libya, as well as Iraq announced the destruction of the last remnants of their weapons of legacy. States Parties continue their endeavours to maintain the integrity and credibility of the CWC regime. While ensuring this, we must also increase our efforts to prevent non-state actors from using toxic chemicals for terrorist or criminal ends. The OPCW is responding to the threat of chemical terrorism in order to ensure that the products of chemistry do not fall into the hands of groups or individuals that wish to cause us harm. This will be an integral part of our evolving mission to prevent the re-emergence of chemical weapons.

The work of the OPCW has brought us to a point where we can begin to believe in a world where chemistry is no longer wielded as a weapon of war. But there is no room for complacency. We must be vigilant to old and new threats, seek every opportunity to promote the peaceful uses of chemistry, and be innovative and forward looking in our approach. The protection that the CWC extends to 98 percent of the global population is only as strong as the willingness of the States Parties to respect and reinforce their commitment to their obligations. Today, as we reflect in solemn remembrance of the fallen and the suffering, there can be no better homage to them than our resolve to work harder and with greater determination to make our world forever free from chemical weapons.

I thank you for your attention.
