



Permanent Representation
of the Federal Republic of Germany
to the OPCW

**Statement by Ambassador Christoph Israng,
Permanent Representative of the Federal Republic of Germany to the OPCW,
Chairperson of the 21st Conference of the States Parties**

**Commemorative Ceremony
on the Occasion of the 20th Anniversary of the OPCW
26 April 2017**

Your Majesty,
Your Royal Highness,
Foreign Minister Koenders,
Mr Director-General,
Excellencies, distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour to address you today as Chair of the Conference of the States Parties.

The Chemical Weapons Convention is indeed a tremendous success story. It has made possible many important achievements, including the destruction of the vast majority of all declared chemical weapons. Almost all members of the United Nations are parties to the CWC. We have made considerable progress on having the absolute taboo of chemical weapons respected by everybody for the sake of all humankind. This accomplishment is a cause for pride, especially for those who have contributed to these efforts: the founding mothers and fathers of the CWC, the dedicated and professional staff of the OPCW under the able leadership of a remarkable Director-General, as well as contributing States Parties and all other stakeholders, such as the chemical industry and active members of civil society. All of them deserve our gratitude. This day is not only a cause for celebration for those directly involved, but even more so for mankind as a whole, because it is demonstrating its resolve to ban an entire category of weapons.

At today's occasion, we must also remember a significant, far less pleasant event. 100 years ago, during the First World War, huge quantities of mustard gas were used for the first time. It was German troops who used this horrific weapon in Ieper. The horrible suffering a hundred years ago should have taught mankind that nothing can justify the use of chemical weapons. No end can ever justify their use. They are cruel, they are indiscriminate, they spread terror and fear.

Sadly, the lesson from Ieper was not learned immediately. During the following decades, on numerous occasions and in many parts of the world, chemical weapons were used again, severely harming and killing human beings – soldiers and civilians alike. The villages of Sardasht and Halabja are but two names in this list of tragedies.

Unfortunately, even today the use of chemical weapons is still a real threat. We have witnessed the use of chemical weapons in Iraq and Malaysia, but most severely in Syria over and over again. It is a horrible reality: chemical weapons are intentionally used to kill and severely harm people. The horrific incident that killed and harmed civilians, among them women and children, on April 4, 2017, in Khan Sheikoun cannot be left unmentioned. We mourn for the victims. Everything must be done to investigate the incident and to identify and bring to justice those responsible.

Speaking more generally, we can and must do everything in our power in order to achieve a world free of chemical weapons. From my perspective, this is a three-pronged effort:

Firstly, there are still members of the UN which are yet to join the CWC. Today, we again call on the very few states that are not yet Parties to the CWC to join the OPCW family without further delay.

Secondly, we have to continue the destruction of existing CW stockpiles. Possessor States enjoy the full support of the international community for the destruction of all their stockpiles, as we currently see in the case of Libya. Also, we must take all necessary measures to ensure that non-state actors cannot get access to critical chemical precursors.

Thirdly, we have to make sure that the OPCW remains optimally positioned to take up potential future challenges, for example in connection with scientific and technological progress. Also, it will be important to make sure that the OPCW can maintain the expertise it has gained in past years.

It is up to us, the OPCW family, to reaffirm our determination, for the sake of all mankind, to exclude completely the possibility of the use of chemical weapons. We must not be negligent when fulfilling the promise of the CWC. Mankind must be able to breathe without fear of being poisoned. Letting up in our joint efforts would suffocate our hopes in connection with the CWC. Together, we must do everything we can to reinforce the absolute taboo of chemical weapons. Together, by close international co-operation, we must fight the evil side and promote the beneficial side of chemistry.

Only by working together, we, the State Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention, can achieve the main objective of the Convention: to free the world of chemical weapons.