



United Nations

# Press Release Secretary-General

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Tuesday, 6 May

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5 May 1997

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SECRETARY-GENERAL CALLS BANNING OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS 'MOMENTOUS ACT OF PEACE',

IN OPENING REMARKS TO CONFERENCE OF PARTIES TO CONVENTION AT THE HAGUE

Opening First Session of Conference, Kofi Annan Calls on States Parties  
To Convention to Ensure Those Weapons Will Never Again Become Part of Arsenals

Following is the text of opening remarks by Secretary-General Kofi Annan at the First Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention, at The Hague, on 6 May:

It is with great pleasure and a genuine sense of promise that I have the honour today of opening the First Session of the Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention. The presence of Your Majesty is a further tribute to the importance of this occasion in The Hague.

We are witnessing today an historic event. An entire category of weapons of mass destruction has been banned by the Chemical Weapons Convention.

One hundred and sixty-five nations have signed the treaty, and more still are planning to join. Eighty-eight countries have ratified the Convention and more still are preparing to do so.

Pause for a moment, if you will, and consider the symbolism, but more importantly the significance of this act.

It is not merely a great step in the cause of disarmament and non-proliferation. It is not merely a signal of restraint and discipline in war. It is much more. It is a momentous act of peace.

What you have done of your own free will is to announce to this and all succeeding generations that chemical weapons are instruments that no State with any respect for itself and no people with any sense of dignity would use in conflicts, whether domestic or international. You have been summoned by history and you have answered its call.

One of the most monstrous tools of warfare has been ruled intolerable by all States Parties. We who have gathered here in The Hague need look no

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farther than to the fields of Flanders or to the streets of Halabjah to see proof of how our century has been scarred and shamed by the use of chemical weapons.

What we can do at its close, however, is to help ensure that they never again can become part of any nation's arsenal, never again the scourge of any battlefield, never again the silent but certain doom of a civilian population.

This is an achievement in which we all can take tremendous pride. The establishment of this unprecedented agreement in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation is the product of years of careful negotiations and detailed preparations.

The Convention establishes an international norm against the development of chemical weapons for all time, and provides the legal and political basis for firm action against those who would violate its rules.

Through the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, a powerful instrument of verification and enforcement will be at the disposal of the international community.

Beyond ensuring that chemical weapons no longer can be produced, the Convention will eliminate all chemical weapons stockpiles and production facilities in all States Parties within a fixed period of time. It will, at the same time, ensure that civilian chemical industries of States are not adversely affected by the Convention's provisions.

It requires States Parties to report the location of chemical weapons storage sites, the location and characteristics of chemical weapons production and research facilities and prohibits trade in certain chemicals with countries not party to the treaty.

The key to the effective implementation of the Convention remains, of course, its universal adoption. While the ratification process worldwide has gained new momentum, I urge that all the signatories, indeed all 185 Members of the United Nations, finish the job that has begun and join the community of ratifying States.

A convention as sweeping, as universal and as specific as this will undoubtedly need a process of adjustment and implementation. Some signatories are new to multilateral regimes of this nature, others uneasy about the verification process and its power of inspection.

To all I say, be patient and stay determined. For it is precisely those provisions that make this a great undertaking whose rewards in the most literal sense are incalculable.

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Recalling the darkest days of the cold war, we may appreciate perhaps better than any previous or succeeding generation the rewards of this treaty.

The Convention on Chemical Weapons is the latest in a series of arms-reduction treaties that, a decade ago, would have seemed unimaginable.

From the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty of 1988 to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) most recently reaffirmed in 1996 to the negotiations on a comprehensive nuclear test-ban treaty, the world has witnessed a commitment to disarmament unprecedented in history.

In the effort to rid the world of land-mines, we have also seen progress. In countries as diverse as Angola, Cambodia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, we can see how the long and hard work of post-conflict rehabilitation is marred many years into the future by the presence of land-mines. We must do more to rid our world of this wicked weapon whose primary targets are the innocents of any conflict -- women and children.

The Chemical Weapons Convention will now join this pantheon of landmark agreements sought and brokered in this remarkable era of peacemaking, to which we are such privileged witnesses.

Allow me, then, to congratulate you on behalf of the United Nations and of peace-loving peoples everywhere. It remains for me to declare the First Conference of the States Parties of the Chemical Weapons Convention open.

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