

Secretary General, in Message for Chemical Warfare Remembrance Day, Calls for Elimination of All Weapons of Mass Destruction

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Following is UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's message for the Day of Remembrance for All Victims of Chemical Warfare, to be observed on 29 April:

This year's Day of Remembrance for All Victims of Chemical Warfare is more significant than ever as it marks the 100th anniversary of the first time chemical weapons were deployed on a large scale in battle. The events in Ypres in 1915 should be a distant memory — but the frightening truth is we are still grappling with the inhumane and indiscriminate effects of chemical weapons today. One hundred years after chlorine gas was used as a weapon of war in Ypres, such horrific weapons continue to threaten humankind.

It is an outrage that 90 years after the 1925 Geneva Protocol and nearly 20 years after the entry into force of the Chemical Weapons Convention, the list of those we mourn on this Day only grows longer. The world has learned too little from the past — at the expense of innocent people whose lives have been destroyed by chemical attacks.

Just two years ago, reports of the use of chemical weapons in Syria served as a shocking wake-up call to the international community about the continuing threat posed by these inhumane weapons. The horrific images of the victims of chemical weapons in Syria should continue to haunt us all.

The multinational effort to rid Syria of its chemical weapons programme clearly demonstrated what can be achieved when the international community unites. Nearly all of Syria's chemical weapon materials have now been removed or destroyed, and the destruction of the remaining chemical weapons production facilities in the country has commenced. This has been one bright moment in an otherwise devastating conflict which must urgently end for the sake of the country's people, the region and our world.

The most recent reports of the continued alleged use of toxic chemicals as a weapon in the Syrian conflict are deeply disturbing. I strongly condemn any such use by any party to the conflict, call for the perpetrators of such acts to be brought to justice, and reiterate

that any use of chemical weapons under any circumstances would be a grave violation of the 1925 Protocol and other relevant rules of customary international law.

On this tragic centenary, I stress again the importance of the Chemical Weapons Convention and strongly urge those few countries that still remain outside this framework to adhere to it without further delay. We will need to maintain our common vigilance until universal membership is attained.

There is no more meaningful way to collectively honour the victims of chemical warfare and make sure that humankind is forever liberated from the ominous threat of the use of chemical weapons. On this Day of Remembrance, let us do more than recall the past — let us shape a new future by renewing our common pledge to rid the world of chemical weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction.

Official observances

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