

**Message
from the International Committee of the Red Cross
to the participants at the Paris Conference
on the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons**

(7-11 January 1989)

In a declaration issued at the end of the Conference on the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons held in Paris from 7 to 11 January, the representatives of 149 countries pledged not to use chemical weapons, and urged the United Nations Conference on Disarmament to conclude a convention as soon as possible to ban their production and storage, and bring about the destruction of existing stocks.

The ICRC welcomed the outcome of the five-day meeting which marked a new determination to eliminate chemical weapons completely.

Here below the *Review* publishes the message which the International Committee sent on 23 December 1988 to the Chairman of the Paris Conference:

“Ever since chemical weapons first made their appearance on the battlefield the International Committee of the Red Cross has vigorously opposed this indiscriminate and particularly cruel means of combat.

As early as February 1918, the ICRC appealed to the belligerents of World War I to conclude an “Immediate Agreement” renouncing any recourse to “a method of warfare which could only be described as criminal”.

Later, the ICRC played an active part in the work leading up to the adoption of the Protocol of 17 June 1925, which the present Conference has been convened inter alia to reaffirm, and in the period between the two World Wars it tried in numerous ways to resolve this grave humanitarian issue.

In its constant concern to ensure that the victims of armed conflicts are protected, the ICRC's opposition to the use of chemical weapons has never wavered. Its attitude has the full support of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

Without entering into legal analysis or being drawn into political discussion the ICRC, looking to the future, feels duty bound to convey to the participants here today its conviction that the ultimate objective of the Paris Conference must be to eliminate the use of chemical weapons in all circumstances and to abolish them completely.

It is convinced that only the attainment of this ambitious, but simple and clear objective will meet the expectations of the peoples of the world, for whom these cruel weapons have caused untold suffering."

The ICRC took an active part in the work leading up to the adoption of the Geneva Protocol of 1925 which prohibits their use in international armed conflicts. However, some countries reserved the right to use them in retaliation, and the production and storage of these lethal arms were not forbidden. Protocol I of 1977 additional to the Geneva Conventions also outlaws the use of weapons which cause superfluous injury.

Chemical weapons have been employed by a number of countries in recent years, killing and causing untold suffering to many innocent civilians, despite the legal ban on their use. The Paris Conference reaffirmed the 1925 Protocol, calling on States to ratify it if they had not already done so.

The next step towards a total ban on chemical weapons began in Geneva less than a week after the Paris Conference ended. The chemical weapons committee of the UN Disarmament Conference met for three weeks of negotiations on the technical aspects of a universal treaty, before the full conference was to resume on 7 February.

The ICRC hoped that the international consensus achieved in Paris would provide the necessary impetus to ensure the creation of a new convention which would go further than ever before by banning the very existence of chemical arms.