

Chemical Weapons Convention enters into force

The *Convention on the prohibition of the development, production, stockpiling and use of chemical weapons and on their destruction*, of 13 January 1993 (Chemical Weapons Convention - CWC) enters into force on 29 April 1997, following the deposit by Hungary on 31 October 1996 of the 65th instrument of ratification. This landmark Convention complements and reinforces the 1925 Geneva Protocol prohibiting the *use* of chemical and biological weapons¹ by also banning the development, production and stockpiling of chemical weapons — as well as their use — and requiring the destruction of existing stockpiles. The 1925 Geneva Protocol was adopted following a dramatic appeal against chemical warfare by the ICRC at the end of the First World War.² The Biological Weapons Convention, in force since 1975, has outlawed the development, production and stockpiling of these weapons.

The Chemical Weapons Convention, which was negotiated in Geneva from 1972 to 1992, was opened for signature in Paris in 1993. It has already attracted 160 States signatory, many more of which are expected to ratify the Convention. Upon its entry into force, a Conference of States Parties will be held and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) will be established in The Hague, Netherlands. The OPCW will be staffed by a secretariat and will be charged with receiving and analysing mandatory State reports on activities involving chemical agents which could pose a threat to the Convention's purposes. The secretariat and its teams of inspectors will be responsible both for conducting the obligatory routine and "challenge" inspections at chemical sites throughout the world and for monitoring the destruction of existing stockpiles.

¹ Protocol for the prohibition of the use in war of asphyxiating, poisonous or other gases, and of bacteriological methods of warfare, of 17 June 1925.

² Reprinted in J. Mirimanoff, "The Red Cross and biological and chemical weapons", *IRRC*, No. 111, June 1970, pp. 301-302.

The Chemical and Biological Weapons Conventions reflect a growing awareness of the need to strengthen international humanitarian law norms prohibiting the *use* of particular weapons with additional measures to ensure that those same weapons are not developed, produced or stockpiled.

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