

(Mr. Adelman, United States)

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To do this, however, we must set realistic objectives. We should, first identify those global security concerns of highest priority which can be addressed appropriately through multilateral solutions. All items on this Conference's agenda are proper subjects for attention of this group but not all are of equal priority. Banning chemical weapons is to me the top priority.

In 1915, at the beginning of World War I, clouds of chlorine gas rolled across the battlefields in Belgium. A Major Auld then wrote:

"Try to imagine the ... troops as they saw the vast cloud of greenish-yellow gas spring out of the ground and slowly move downwind toward them, the vapour clinging to the earth, seeking out every hole and hollow ... first wonder, then fear; then, as the first fringes of the cloud enveloped them and left them choking and agonized in the fight for breath -- panic. Those who could move broke and ran, trying, generally in vain, to outstrip the cloud which followed inexorably after them."

Chemical weapons caused over 1 million casualties and 90,000 deaths in World War I. In the 1930s they were used in Ethiopia by Mussolini's forces. Then, for 30 years, no nation used them on the battlefield.

In the late 1960s, however, there was evidence of their reappearance on an obscure battlefield in Yemen. In the mid-1970s, the Hmong people of Laos became the next victims of chemical warfare. In 1979 began reliable reports of chemical weapons being used by Soviet forces in Afghanistan. And Vietnamese and Lao troops, Soviet surrogate forces, continued to use chemical weapons against the Hmong resistance. Then, in 1983 the world witnessed Iraq using chemical weapons in its dismal war against Iran.

All this despite a major international agreement that bans the use of chemical weapons. The Geneva Protocol, completed in 1925 with the grim lessons of World War I then so fresh in mind, has been a major bulwark against chemical weapons use. More than 100 countries are parties. But that international legal restriction and the morality which lay beneath it have been in danger of crumbling as a result of these barbaric practices since 1975.

The political, moral and legal barriers against the use of chemical weapons are in danger of being torn down by such violations. We need now to re-establish and further buttress those longstanding norms of acceptable and civilised international behaviour. Today, there are even more threatening, toxic killer chemicals available. They are weapons of mass destruction, and weapons of mass suffering inflicted on defenseless civilians, thus far in non-aligned, poor countries. And as the Iraqi example makes clear, they are relatively cheap and readily available.

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