

(Mr. Lowitz, United States)

Information available to us -- and the dramatic evidence that chemical weapons have been used in several recent conflicts -- make clear that chemical weapons capabilities are spreading. In fact, more than a dozen States possess chemical weapons. The spread of chemical weapons poses a threat to all countries, particularly developing countries.

As more countries acquire chemical weapons, the likelihood increases that chemical weapons will be used, causing horrible suffering and a weakening of the 1925 Geneva Protocol. Both fashion and fear may prompt additional countries to obtain chemical weapons and this dangerous process of the spread of chemical weapons could begin to feed on itself. At some point an effective chemical weapons ban could become almost impossible to negotiate because of the number of countries with security requirements to be satisfied, not the least of which would be the extensiveness of the verification system.

The United States has expressed concern over the use of chemical weapons by several countries in various regions of the world -- in the Middle East, in Afghanistan, and in South-East Asia. We have strongly supported international investigation of reports of the use of chemical weapons. We believe that the legal and moral authority of the Geneva Protocol of 1925 must be upheld and that urgent attention by the world community is called for whenever use of chemical weapons is reported.

A year ago, on 13 March 1984, the United States representative to this Conference conveyed our conclusion that Iraq had used lethal chemical weapons in its conflict with Iran and that this constituted a serious breach of the protocol and of related rules of customary international law. Today it is my sad task to report our conclusion that Iraq has again used chemical weapons, in the recent fighting with Iran. My Government condemns the use of chemical weapons in violation of international law and conventions whenever and wherever it occurs, including this latest instance.

There is little doubt that recent violations of the Geneva Protocol are a threat to the integrity of the most venerable of arms control agreements and, in fact, a threat to the foundations of the arms control process itself: the belief that States may find genuine security based on international agreements and law instead of their own armaments. This should be a sobering thought for a conference seeking to negotiate new arms control agreements.

All States need confidence that the treaties they enter into are being complied with. When that confidence is eroded so is the hope we place in an international structure based on law.

Many nations prefer to treat compliance concerns as a matter only for the accuser and the accused. Yet in matters of international security, especially in the nuclear age, there can be no spectators. A State's responsibility for an arms control agreement must not end when it is signed. States cannot remain indifferent when such basic interests as the integrity of present and future treaties are involved: they must take an active role. However, the United States is not asking other nations to choose sides, but only to realize that the allegations are sufficiently troubling -- especially but not exclusively in the area of chemical weapons -- to warrant an active interest in the matter, including a search for resolution of the disputes.