

4. CHEMICAL WEAPONS

Background

In recent years there have been various allegations about the use of chemical weapons in regional conflicts. This has raised awareness of the importance of prohibition. The early conclusion of a chemical weapons ban has been designated a priority by the Canadian Government. Negotiations in this area take place primarily in the Conference on Disarmament (CD). In addition, Canada has been involved in meetings sponsored by Australia (in June and September of 1985) to discuss ways to present obstacles to the possible use of chemical weapons. Officials and chemical experts, representing the United States and the Western European and Asian countries with advanced chemical technology, participated in these meetings.¹

Although a chemical weapons ban has been on the agenda of the Conference on Disarmament and its various antecedents since 1968, little substantive progress had been made by 1980. Therefore, in an attempt to facilitate action, the forty-nation CD established the Ad Hoc Working Group on Chemical Weapons. All CD participants were represented. Their first task was to define the issues that a ban on chemical weapons should cover. The 1925 Geneva Protocol prohibits the use of asphyxiating, poisonous and other gases, and many of its signatories, including Canada, retain the right to retaliate to any attack by chemical weapons. The second task of the Working Group was to draft a comprehensive treaty which would constitute an effective and verifiable ban on the development, production, stockpiling, transfer and use of chemical weapons.

In view of the limitations of the Geneva Protocol and in the hope of providing a basis for further multilateral negotiations, Canada submitted

¹ "Proliferating Poison - The Fight Against the Spread of Chemical Weapons", The Washington Post, 23 September, 1985.