

Mr. President, distinguished colleagues,

In April 1915, Canadian soldiers in Flanders were among the first to suffer the terror, pain and death inflicted by chemical weapons. Of those who recovered from exposure to poison gas, many suffered on for their remaining years. At least three generations of Canadians -- parents, the victims themselves, and their children -- became acutely aware of the cruel and horrible effects of the use of such weapons. It is a tragic part of Canada's national memory.

No wonder nations in the post-war years sought a treaty which would prevent any further use of such terrible weapons in warfare. The 1925 Geneva Protocol is not a perfect document. It represents a political and legal commitment. It is also a moral guideline. The problem with the protocol is that obligations have not been fulfilled. The protocol has been violated on more than one occasion: even more distressing is that these violations were not unanimously denounced throughout the world.

In that sense, the world has slipped back from the high purpose of this Protocol. This meeting is designed to reaffirm that purpose, and to help create a confidence and a resolve which our negotiators at Geneva can translate into practical progress on a Convention to ban the production and use of chemical weapons. That is a great challenge by itself, and Canada hopes that, at this Conference, we can concentrate our efforts on the business at hand - the issue of chemical weapons.

This Conference is testimony to the international judgement that chemical warfare is repugnant and it must be abolished. The obligations of the 1925 Geneva Protocol must be reaffirmed and upheld. All violations must be condemned. We commend President Reagan for having proposed a conference of this kind and President Mitterrand for his initiative in convening it so quickly.