

## 5. 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 their 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), at Geneva but there have also been bilateral negotiations between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Although a chemical weapons ban has been on the agenda of the Conference on Disarmament and its various antecedents since 1968, it is only in recent years that there has been any progress. In an attempt to facilitate action, the forty-nation CD established the Ad Hoc Working Group on Chemical Weapons in 1980 at which 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, but does not ban their manufacture or stockpiling. Most 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 1983 it developed a consensus document which identified the elements of a comprehensive treaty, and outlined areas of agreement and disagreement.

In 1984 the United States put forward a proposal for a ban on chemical weapons which marked an important step in the CD negotiations on chemical weapons. The proposal was noteworthy in suggesting verification by challenge inspections - sudden mandatory inspections of plants suspected of cheating. It was agreed in 1984 that the destruction of existing