

### 3. CHEMICAL WEAPONS

#### *BACKGROUND*

The use of chemical weapons during World War I led the international community to develop ways of prohibiting their use and development. In the period after World War I, these efforts took place at the League of Nations. In 1925, at a meeting intended to develop ways of controlling the international arms trade, a US proposal to ban exports of chemical weapons led to the creation of the Geneva Protocol<sup>1</sup> which banned the use of chemical and bacteriological weapons in war. As of 1 January 1992, there were 130 parties to the Geneva Protocol.

The Geneva Protocol remains the primary international legislation on chemical weapons. However, its limitations have been clear since it was first signed. While the Protocol prohibits the use of chemical and bacteriological weapons in war, it does nothing to prohibit the development, production, transfer or stockpiling of such weapons. Efforts at the League of Nations after 1925 to expand chemical weapons limitations collapsed with the failure of the League in the 1930s. After World War II, efforts to limit chemical weapons took a back seat to negotiations on atomic weapons.

It was not until 1968 that official international efforts began again, this time under the auspices of the United Nations. At that time, the question of chemical and bacteriological weapons was placed on the agenda of the Eighteen Nation Disarmament Commission (ENDC). In 1971, a shift in the position of the Soviet Union opened the way for consideration of chemical weapons separately from biological weapons. Britain had originally proposed this separation in 1968, but the idea was strongly opposed by the Soviets. By 10 April 1972, the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) was open for signature.

The early success of the Biological Weapons Convention did not influence the negotiations on chemical weapons. In spite of continued work through the 1970s at the Conference on Disarmament (CD), it was not until the early to mid-1980s that the goal of a convention completely banning chemical weapons appeared within reach.

In 1985, the US and the Soviet Union agreed to initiate bilateral discussions on chemical weapons limits, in addition to the ongoing work at the CD. As of late summer 1992, considerable progress towards

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<sup>1</sup> The 1925 Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use in War of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or Other Gases, and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare, Geneva, May 1925.