

(Mr. von Stülpnagel, Federal Republic of Germany)

... The traumatic experience with chemical weapons during the First World War made the international community aware of the barbarity of these weapons and led to the conclusion of the Geneva Protocol of 1925. We are now in a somewhat similar situation: the use of chemical weapons in the war between Iran and Iraq and against the Kurdish civilian population has alarmed the international community. Is the recent actual use of chemical weapons only an indication that the taboo on chemical weapons is disappearing? The alleged rapid spread of these weapons seems to confirm this notion. Chemical weapons are now said to be in the arsenals of more than 20 countries. This situation which must cause serious concern, calls for determined action. And we have to act expeditiously. We are called upon to stem the tide and prevent chemical weapons from becoming an accepted means of warfare. The Paris Conference united high-level representatives from 149 countries in the common endeavour to put an end to the use and spread of chemical weapons. To this end, all participants in the Paris Conference stressed in the Final Declaration the urgency of concluding, at the earliest date, a convention banning chemical weapons.

The Geneva Protocol has proved - as we have become painfully aware - inadequate to prevent the use of chemical weapons. It still allows the development, acquisition and stockpiling of chemical weapons. Another major drawback is that the Geneva Protocol does not provide for any verification measures. Clearly the best way to stop the proliferation of chemical weapons and to free mankind once and for all from the scourge of chemical weapons is the conclusion of a comprehensive and effectively verifiable convention which ensures that all existing chemical weapons stocks and chemical weapons production facilities are eliminated and that any further manufacture, acquisition, transfer and use of these weapons is prohibited and that this is subject to effective verification. Unless such a comprehensive solution is obtained, the risk of use of chemical weapons will persist.

Interim measures designed to prevent the proliferation of chemical weapons are far less effective than a comprehensive chemical weapons convention and I will say why. A comprehensive ban is the only means of establishing an internationally and globally accepted norm that makes the possession of chemical weapons illegal. A régime providing only for non-proliferation measures would be considered by many to be discriminatory. There may not be sufficient incentive to renounce the option of acquiring chemical weapons as long as arsenals of chemical weapons continue to exist. Interim measures, moreover, cannot reliably rule out any misuse of chemicals and equipment which have been supplied for peaceful purposes. And there will be no means of verification to deter such misuse and dispel suspicion of clandestine production of chemical weapons. If we perceive the fight against chemical weapons as consisting only of measures to prevent their proliferation, we are ignoring the real scope of the issue. We could thereby undermine the commitment of the international community to erase chemical weapons from the face of the Earth by way of a global and comprehensive convention.