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Statement

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"BANNING CHEMICAL WEAPONS FOR ALL TIMES"

SPEECH BY

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE JOE CLARK,

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS,

TO THE PARIS CONFERENCE

PARIS, FRANCE

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Secretary of State
for
External Affairs

Secrétaire d'État
aux
Affaires extérieures

Canada

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.

Canada's goal is to have all nations ban all chemical weapons - to get rid of them everywhere and for ever. We seek a comprehensive ban, that prohibits not only the use, but the production and stockpiling, of chemical weapons. That will not happen overnight. It will require a reliable means of verification, which will let us test each other's word and assess each other's practice. Great progress has been made in the negotiation of a global, comprehensive and verifiable ban. That work must be pursued urgently, in the Conference on Disarmament, and in bilateral discussions. But this extraordinary meeting can take concrete steps toward that goal.

Specifically, we can condemn the use of chemical weapons, and commit ourselves not to use them.

We can reaffirm the Geneva Protocol of 1925, and call on other States to adhere to it.

We can strengthen the capacity of the Secretary-General of the United Nations to investigate allegations of chemical weapons use.

As a party to the 1925 Geneva Protocol, Canada has accepted fully its obligations on chemical weapons use. Our policy is clear:

- Canada does not intend at any time to initiate the use of chemical weapons;
- Canada does not intend to develop, produce, acquire or stockpile such weapons, unless these weapons are used against the military forces or the civil population of Canada or its allies.

What does this mean?

- First, it means that Canada is applying its obligations under the Protocol to Parties and non-Parties alike.
- Second, we have adopted a firm policy of non-production to help achieve a comprehensive ban on chemical weapons.
- Third, Canada has already advised other nations of the destruction of the bulk, useable chemical warfare agents which it had stockpiled during the Second World War.

The 1925 Geneva Protocol also prohibits the use of biological methods of warfare. The Protocol was supplemented by the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention which prohibits the development, production and stockpiling of biological and toxin weapons and requires their destruction. Canada moved

beyond its obligations under the 1925 Geneva Protocol well before the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention. In 1970 Canada declared that it never has had -- and does not possess now -- any biological or toxin weapons and does not intend to develop, produce, acquire, stockpile or use such weapons at any time in the future. That remains Canada's policy and practice today.

Only two countries - the United States and the Soviet Union - have admitted that they produce and possess chemical weapons. Other countries which possess chemical weapons should adopt that spirit of openness.

Treaties are not only pieces of paper which, once signed, simply become historical reference points. They require constant attention and care. In this spirit Canada's Verification Research Programme has sought to develop ways to investigate allegations of the use of chemical weapons. We have made the results of our work available to other nations. In 1987 Canada, along with Norway, proposed an annex to the future Convention on procedures for verification of allegations of use of chemical weapons. As well, we have fully supported the measures taken by the United Nations Secretary-General to investigate past allegations.

The test of any arms control agreement is how well it is respected. The purpose is to increase everyone's security, and that will happen only if we all have confidence that others will honour the rules we honour. There is agreement here on the urgent need for a ban that works. There has been real progress at Geneva in negotiating a Convention. Now it is time to resolve the important outstanding issues.

Verification of a chemical weapons ban will be complex, expensive and intrusive. The price of a treaty, in human endeavour, in self-limitations on sovereignty and in resources will be substantial. But experience shows that the cost of failing will be far greater.

In the meantime, there is a need for national self-restraint. It is of great concern to my government that the spread of chemical weapons has continued and that they have again been used. We considered it a necessary and logical consequence of our policy on chemical weapons to ensure that Canadian industry not contribute, even inadvertently, to any use of chemical weapons. We hope others will do the same.

There is no doubt that there is a collective international desire for a comprehensive ban on chemical weapons. This is demonstrated each year at the United Nations General Assembly through a consensus resolution which Canada and Poland, among others, sponsor. This issue concerns not only 40 States negotiating a chemical weapons convention in the Conference on Disarmament, but also the world at large.

The Conference on Disarmament certainly derives strength from such a consensus, as it seeks to conclude a treaty of great complexity and unparalleled scope. Clearly, the speed with which today's Conference has been convened; and the international response to it are cause for optimism about the future.

Mr. President, the elimination of chemical weapons from the face of the earth is not merely a pragmatic necessity. More than a common sense assessment of our security interests is involved. The issue touches on our sense of ourselves as human beings. We know that, individually and collectively, we are susceptible to insecurities, fears and animosities. This is a reality. Surely, it is the responsibility of governments to seek to limit our capability to inflict abhorrent cruelties and punishments on each other. Chemical weapons use, inevitably involving civilian as well as military victims, only provoke revulsion. Chemical weapons must be banned. We owe our citizens no less. Let us get on with the task.