

Address to the First Review Conference of the Chemical Weapons Convention by Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, April 28th, 2003.

It gives me great pleasure to be here with you, in my own city of The Hague, looking back on five years of the OPCW, and of course looking forward to what the future might hold for this young organization and the Convention that forms its foundation.

As this is a review conference, an event we envisage holding only once every five years, we cannot restrict ourselves to looking at the Chemical Weapons Convention in isolation. It is only one of the cornerstones of a three-sided pyramid of arms control and disarmament treaties that cover all weapons of mass destruction - nuclear, biological and chemical. The respective elements of this triad sometimes appear to behave like communicating vessels. Their aims - the complete eradication of weapons of mass destruction from the face of this earth - cannot, of course, be achieved in isolation.

The Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT), the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) and the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), being part of the same building, pretty

much face the same weather conditions. With the current developments in the Middle East, North-East Asia and South Asia, those conditions appear to be stormy. The nuclear side of the pyramid is definitively catching the brunt of the gale. Most of the regional issues I just referred to are being played out largely in the nuclear field. Furthermore, this side is still under construction. The Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, completed in 1996, has yet to enter into force. Negotiations on a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty are proving difficult to get off the ground.

The biological side of the pyramid is still recovering from the failure of the exercise to reinforce the Biological Weapons Treaty by introducing verification measures. Perhaps the timing was not right, but the end result is that for the moment we have to live with a Convention that mainly establishes a norm. While this is, of course, very important in itself, without verification it remains incomplete.

In comparison, the Chemical Weapons Convention and OPCW side of the pyramid appears to be made of solid marble, polished to a shine. To begin with, the Convention encompasses the prohibition of a complete class of weapons of mass destruction, without exception. Not only

that, the Convention also provides a verification mechanism that treats all States Parties equally in comparable circumstances. And finally, it establishes an organization, the OPCW, to take care of much of the implementation of the Convention.

That organization has successfully survived its pioneering stage, as it is often called in management literature. As a matter of fact, it has come out pretty good. One of the last remaining issues to put it on a solid footing - tenure policy - I hope can be decided shortly. The Netherlands is genuinely proud to be hosting this young, but already well developed organization.

Now, to return to the theme of my address: in many ways, the CWC may be the most mature of the three sides of the NBC pyramid of arms control and disarmament treaties. However, I also suggested that, to some extent, these Conventions are communicating vessels, and that they share the same destiny. That destiny is a norms-based international community, enshrined in an international legal framework that does justice to all.

Now, how does all of this translate into lessons for the CWC and the OPCW?

First of all, progress towards such a world governed by international law is slow, and progress on different tracks will be at different speeds. We should cherish and safeguard our accomplishments on the chemical track. We should also beware of focusing too much on linkages with other treaties, even though we realize they are all part of the same structure. Chemical weapons are horrendous, and we should reaffirm our political commitment to banning them for good.

This brings me to my second point. Unless the Convention covers all countries, especially those in regions typified by low mutual confidence amongst states, the goal of a total ban will continue to elude us. We need to invest our political capital in convincing states that are not yet party to this convention to sign up, without delay. Again, a linkage with other conventions is not helpful in this respect. To become party to the CWC is in every country's security interests. True, it would be only a first step towards achieving a Middle East free of weapons of mass destruction, for example - a goal that I wholeheartedly support - but it would be a worthwhile step for all countries in that region. As I said before, a world ruled by international law will not come about overnight. But that should be no excuse for not taking a step when it is feasible.

And thirdly, we must not be blinded by the gleam of polished marble. The CWC and the OPCW face challenges from within. Continued success hinges on our ability to make a success of the verification mechanisms. They must provide reasonable assurances to all States Parties that other States Parties are complying with the provisions of the Convention.

After the destruction of chemical weapons, the core task for this organization will be mainly to provide a credible verification mechanism that ensures that chemical facilities are not diverted from peaceful uses to clandestine ones. The next five years will be crucial and we need to use the entire toolkit of the Convention in these efforts. I believe that a challenge inspection in the coming period could demonstrate the usefulness of that particular tool. I also believe that we have to 'future-proof' the Convention, by making sure that new and as yet unlisted chemicals that can be used as chemical weapons are treated as such.

But before I get into too much detail, let me try to sum up by rephrasing the core challenges ahead:

- We need to reaffirm our political commitment to this Convention, and invest our political capital in promoting its universality.
- We must stress compliance and further develop its verification mechanisms, so that the Convention can perform its confidence- and security-building function to the full.
- We need not shy away from using all the instruments the Convention offers in order to promote full compliance with its provisions.

Also, a strict and universal implementation of the CWC could be its main contribution to our common fight against terrorism.

I wish you every success during this conference in furthering our common goals, and I hope that my remarks will in some way help guide your debate over the coming two weeks.
