

## **Make Chemical Warfare History**

by

Paul Walker and Cristian Ion

The frequent and indiscriminate attacks recently by Iraqi insurgents using chemical agents remind the world of the horrors of chemical weapons. Terrifying memories of gassed WWI soldiers, of innocent Iraqi civilians poisoned by Saddam Hussein, or of commuters gasping for air in the Tokyo subway spring to mind. Amidst these historic images, this month 182 countries will celebrate the tenth anniversary of their agreement to never produce, stockpile, or use chemical agents, and the creation of an international regime of verification. The Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) has had many achievements, but only adherence by all nations and complete elimination of chemical weapons will assure the world that such horrific images will only be found in history books.

The CWC entered into force on April 29, 1997, and today includes 93% of the world's nations. The six chemical weapon possessor countries are required to destroy their stockpiles by April 29, 2012.

The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), which implements the CWC, will formally mark its first decade on May 9<sup>th</sup>, dedicating a memorial at its headquarters in The Hague to the thousands killed and disfigured by chemical warfare over the past century. It has many reasons to celebrate: the destruction of 25% of declared stockpiles, the destruction of 2.6 million chemical munitions and containers, and the completion of 2,800 on-site inspections in 77 countries. All of these have built confidence in the non-proliferation of deadly agents and know-how.

However great the accomplishment of the past ten years, the treaty regime still faces major challenges to its legitimacy and global success:

- Over 50,000 tons of declared chemical agents still await destruction, the great majority of them in Russia (35,000 tons) and the United States (15,000 tons). Both countries are unlikely to meet the final stockpile destruction deadline of April 29, 2012, thus violating the CWC and potentially undermining the confidence developed over the past decade.
- Thirteen countries still remain outside of the treaty regime, primarily in two geographic areas of concern – North Korea, and the Mideast nations of Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Lebanon, and Syria.

Chemical agents are often called the “poor man’s nuclear weapon” and are the most likely weapon of mass destruction (WMD) to be used by terrorists in the future. The chlorine attacks in Baghdad may now indicate wider use of such makeshift and indiscriminate bombs. In order to complete making chemical warfare “history,” the following steps will be necessary this year:

- The United States and Russia must fully fund their chemical weapons destruction programs. The United States needs to commit at least another \$200 million annually in construction funds to the last two CW stockpile sites. Russia must likewise increase its funding by a similar amount.
- The United States and Russia must move forward in a mutually cooperative way with construction and full funding at Shchuch'ye, the most vulnerable of Russian CW stockpiles, containing 5,400 tons of nerve agents in two million man-portable artillery shells. This project, over a decade old, has stalled unnecessarily over the past two years, endangering international security. The cutoff of U.S. funding also must be turned around.
- The G-8 Global Partnership, established five years ago in Kananaskis, Canada, to help Russia secure and destroy its nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, must fulfill its pledges of \$20 billion over ten years and continue to work with Russia on eliminating its remaining four chemical weapons stockpiles, beyond 2012, if necessary.
- The OPCW, member states, and non-governmental organizations must pressure North Korea, the holdout states in the Middle East, and other non-signatory countries to join the treaty regime in order to make it truly universal.

No threat can ever be completely eliminated globally. But completing the ban on development, production, and stockpiling of chemical agents under the Chemical Weapons Convention will truly make any future use of deadly chemical agents taboo.

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