

Secretary-General's message to "A Century of Weapons of Mass Destruction: Enough!" - Event organized by the Municipalities of Ypres and Langemarck-Poelkapelle in Cooperation with the International Network of Mayors for Peace [Delivered by Ms. Virginia

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Ypres, Belgium

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I am pleased to greet all participants at this conference on the centennial of the first use of poison gas on a massive scale in world history. It is fitting that this event has been organized by the municipalities of Ypres and Langemarck-Poelkapelle, where chemical weapons were so catastrophically used in the war that many once hoped would be the war to "end all wars".

This solemn anniversary is an occasion for the world to pay tribute to the victims of those horrific weapons. If those victims could speak, they would no doubt demand action to destroy all such weapons so they could never be used again.

We have a shared responsibility to pursue a universal ban on the possession and use of all weapons of mass destruction – nuclear, chemical, and biological. WMDs are inherently indiscriminate weapons and grossly inconsistent with international humanitarian law.

Today is about more than mourning the past – it is an opportunity to confront the present. Conditions today underscore the need to eliminate all weapons of mass destruction. Force is still used as a tool of policy. Terrorists continue launching increasingly violent attacks against innocent civilians. Thousands of nuclear weapons are deployed and ready for use at a moment's notice. Allegations persist about the continued use of toxic chemicals in the conflict in Syria.

This threat is particularly grave in cities, where civilian populations are most densely concentrated and where over half of humanity now resides. I applaud the interest shown by city leaders in addressing this challenge, particularly the work of Mayors for Peace and the strong support they have gained in thousands of cities around the world.

Rather than despair, we must build upon humanity's natural repugnance against the indiscriminate targeting of civilians. It is not enough to aim to keep weapons of mass destruction from "falling into the wrong hands". There are no right hands for weapons that are just plain wrong.

We have now had a century of WMDs. Our response to this tragic milestone can only be to declare: Enough! After all these years, let us honour the memory of past victims by ensuring that there will be no future ones.