



The Issue of Chemical Weapons



According to the OPCW, “a chemical weapon is a chemical used to cause intentional death or harm through its toxic properties. Munitions, devices and other equipment specifically designed to weaponize toxic chemicals also fall under the definition of chemical weapons”. In 1925, the Geneva Protocol was signed, and it prohibited the use of chemical weapons in warfare due to the devastating amount of suffering due to chlorine, phosgene and mustard gases being released over soldiers in World War One. However, the Protocol did not prohibit the development, production or stockpiling of chemical weapons. As a result, chemical weapons have caused more than 1 million casualties across the world since World War One.

On the 3rd September 1992, after 12 years of negotiations, the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) was adopted by the Conference on Disarmament. It entered into force on the 29th April 1997. In order to prepare for the entry-into-force of the CWC, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) was formally established to put into place the necessary infrastructure for the permanent implementing agency provided for in the CWC. Currently, 193 nations have joined the CWC (about 98% of the global population). There are 4 UN member states that are not parties to the treaty, Israel has signed but not ratified the treaty, while the DPRK, Egypt and South Sudan have neither signed nor acceded to the treaty.

In the world overall, there is 72,524 metric tonnes of chemical agent, 8.67 million chemical munitions and containers and 97 production facilities that have been declared to the OPCW regarding stockpiled chemical weapons (according to Wikipedia). There has been steps to the destruction of these chemical weapons by the CWC and all 97 declared chemical weapons production facilities (CWPFs) have been deactivated. However, these are only the weapons that have been declared to the OPCW and there is a strong possibility that there are many that have not been declared (particularly from states not party to the CWC) which could lead to devastating destruction.

Although most declared stockpiles of chemical weapons have been destroyed or are undergoing the process of destruction, recently there have been chemical weapons attacks. In February 2017, North Korean agents used a nerve agent known as VX to assassinate Kim Jong Nam, the half-brother of Kim Jong Un in Malaysia. Furthermore, in Salisbury (4th March 2018), Sergei Skirpal (a former Russian officer convicted of spying for the UK) and his daughter were poisoned with chemical weapon (nerve agent) Novichok which was developed by the USSR between 1971 and 1993 and claimed to be 5 times more potent than VX. This is a problem as these nerve agents were developed before the CWC was entered into force and it still remains unclear as to who was the perpetrator of the poisoning although the UK accused Russia and many other countries expelled Russian diplomats in retaliation to the attack.

Points To consider:

- Should all member states be forced to sign and ratify the CWC?

- What is your nation's stance regarding chemical weapons? Has it used them frequently in the past? Has it signed and ratified the CWC? Has it allegedly used chemical weapons recently?
- Should all member states in compliance with the CWC be checked for stockpiles of chemical weapons? If yes, should nations that aren't party to the CWC be forced to declare their chemical weapons stockpiles?
- How can the UN ensure that member states have no more stockpiled chemical weapons than the ones that they have declared?

Useful links:

- The World CIA fact book: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>
- Arms Control- Association Chemical and Biological Weapons at a glance: <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/cbwprolif>
- UN UNODA- Chemical Weapons: <https://www.un.org/disarmament/wmd/chemical/>